PERLYCROSS

R. D. Blackmore

W. H. SMI
SUBSCRIPTIO
186, STRAN
AND AT THE RA
VELS ARE ISSUED TO AND RECEIV
TE
FOR SUBSCRIBERS OBTAINING THEIR
For ONE Volume at a tir
(Novels in more than One Volume
For TWO Volumes ,,
(Novels in more than Two Volumes a
For THREE Volumes ,,
For FOUR ,, ,,
For SIX ,, ,,
For TWELVE ,, ,,
5 5 0
The clerks in charge of Messrs. W. H.
books with Illustrations and Maps are issue
Library perfect in nu
ired to see that
the subscribers to the
ion.

PERLYCROSS.

A TALE OF THE WESTERN HILLS.

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF "LORNA DOONE," "SPRINGHAVEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

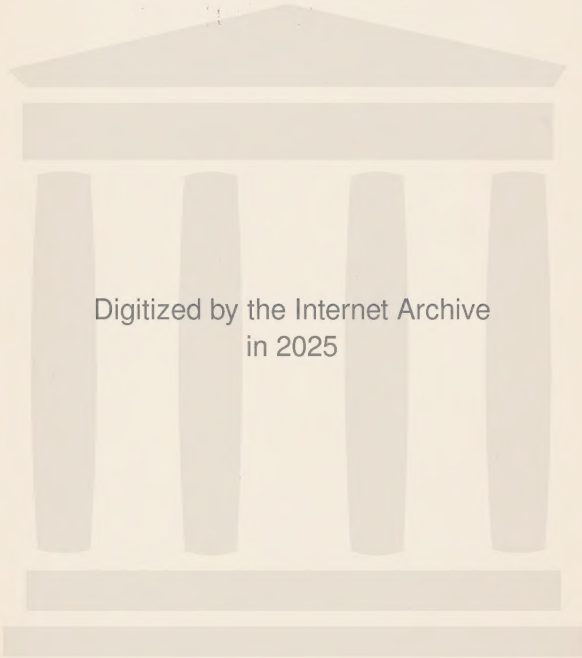
LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & COMPANY
LIMITED,
St. Dunstan's House,
FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.
1894.

[*All rights reserved*]

LONDON :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Percussion	1
II.	Discussion	23
III.	Blackmarsh	44
IV.	Fireship and Galleon	68
V.	A Magic Letter	94
VI.	A Wager	119
VII.	A Sermon in Stone	149
VIII.	The Old Mill	171
IX.	Panic	192
X.	Vagabonds	218
XI.	Two Puzzles	243
XII.	Frankly speaking	261


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/perlycrosstaleof00blac_1

PERLYCROSS.

CHAPTER I.

PERCUSSION.

Now this was not the right time of year for spring of hope, and bounding growth; the first bloom-bud of the young heart growing milky, and yet defiant; and the leaf-bud pricking up, hard and reckless, because it can never have a family. Not the right time yet for whispered openings, and shy blush of petals, still uncertain of the air, and creeping back into each other's clasp, lest they should be tempted to come out too soon. Neither was there in the air itself that coy, delusive, tricksome way, which it cannot help itself for having, somewhere about the month of April, when the sun is apt to challenge and then shirks the brunt.

In a word (though no man can prove a negative, as Jemmy Fox had well remarked)

it was the very time when no young man, acquainted with the calendar of his Church, should dream of falling into love, even though he had a waistcoat of otterskin, and fourteen pearl-buttons upon it.

In spite of all that, it was the positive which prevailed in this case. Frank Gilham had received such a blow upon his heart, that the season and the weather were nothing to it. The fall of the leaf, and retirement of the sap —though the Saps now tell us that it never does retire—had less than no effect upon his circulation. He went in vainly for a good day's ploughing, for he could hold as well as drive; but there was his waistcoat, and his heart inside it; and even when he hung the one upon an oak-tree, the other kept going on, upon its private business; and "Whoa! Stand still, Hossy!" had no effect upon it.

He sneaked into the house, as if he had no right there—though his mother had only a life-interest—and he made a serious matter of the shortness of his nails, and felt a conscientious longing, when he saw his whiskers, to kick the barber at Pumpington, who had shorn them with a pair of tailor's scissors so abominably, on the last market-day. But last market-day, this young man's heart had been inditing

of pigs and peas, whereof he had made a tidy penny, because he was a sharp fellow then.

"How is she now?" he asked his young sister Rose, when he came down at last, discontented with himself, though appearing unusually smart to her.

"Well, thank you, Frank, mother is not quite the thing to-night. She did not get quite her proper rest, you know, on account of the strange young lady. And she never took her hore-hound lozenges. She thinks too much of others, and too little of herself——"

"As if I did not know all that! Will you never tell me anything I want to know? But I suppose the young lady won't keep her up to-night?"

"She? Oh she is all right enough. You should just see her eat. My goodness! Talk of farmhouse appetites!"

"Rose, who are you to understand such things? You have seen so very little of the world; and you judge it entirely by yourself. I suppose the door is not open?"

"Oh yes. Anybody can look in, if that's what you want to do. She has been sitting up ever so long, with mother's dressing-gown and Sunday shawl on. Such a guy you never see in all your life!"

"A pity you can't be a guy then. Why Rose, if you only had a hundredth part—— "

"Yes, I dare say. But I don't want, don't you see? I am quite contented as I am; and better judges than you will ever be—why that coloured hair is quite out of fashion now. Everybody goes in for this sort of tint, and a leaden comb to make it darker. Corkscrews are all the rage, and they can't be too black. Why Minnie Farrant told me, last Sunday, that she read on the best authority—— "

"Her Bible, or her Prayer-book?"

"Don't be so absurd. The very best authority, that Queen Adelaide herself told His Majesty as much, and he said he was a Tar, and the best pitch wasn't black. That was to please her, you know. Wasn't it clever of him? Oh Frank, why don't you fall in love with Minnie Farrant—your own Godfather's favourite child, and they say she'll have four thousand pounds?"

"Minnie Farrant! Why, I'd rather have a broomstick. Though she is all very well in her way, of course."

"She is the prettiest girl in this parish, by long chalks, except of course Nicie Waldron. And I suppose you wouldn't quite stick up to her."

"Stick up indeed! Is that the way you learn to express yourself at a finishing school? But do look sharp with the frying-pan, if your corkscrews are not too precious. I don't want Minnie Farrant, nor even Miss Waldron—I want my little bit of supper, and you know it well enough. I am sorry for the ninny that ever falls in love with you."

"So am I. Because I won't have him. But what fun it will be! I shall starve him out. All you men think about is eating; and I shall say——"

"Rose again, as usual! Her long tongue running away with her." Mrs. Gillam looked very serious, for every day she found stronger proof that girls were not as they used to be. "You have had your tea, child, and you want nothing more. I am sure you should be the very last to talk as if eating were a sin. Go and help Mary with your dear brother's supper. He has been hard at work all day."

"Sticks to his work, wants no diverting—
A model young man in the farming line!
Never goes hunting, dancing, flirting,
Doesn't know the flavour of a glass of wine."

Away danced Rosie to the tune of her own song, with her light figure frisking from side to side of the long stone passage.

"Ah me! I fear we shall have trouble yet with that very thoughtless girl. She can only see the light side of everything. It is high time for her now; why before I was seventeen— But Frank, you don't look like yourself to-night!" The old lady went up to him, and pushed aside his hair, as crisp and curly as a double hyacinth. "I am almost sure, there is something on your mind. Your dear father had exactly that expression upon his face, at periods of his married life. But then it was always the times when he had rheumatics in his left shoulder blade; and I used to iron them out with brown paper, the darkest brown that you can get, and a sprinkle of vinegar underneath, as hot as ever you can bear it; in fact, until it begins to singe, and then——"

"Well, nobody will ever do that to me, thank God!" Frank spoke in a very reckless tone, and strictly avoided his mother's eyes.

"I will, my son, if I live long enough. Old Mrs. Horner used to say—not the present Mrs. John, you know, but her husband's mother——"

"Excuse me, dear mother, but I thought I heard a call. Shall I go, and knock at the young lady's door?"

"Frank, how can you ask such a question? Not that she is not in very pretty order, and

fit for any one to look at her; with my dressing-gown on, as good as new, and the big picture-Bible on one side of her, and 'The Fashionable Lady's Vade Mecum' on the other."

"How queer she must look in your dressing-gown, mother! Quite an old frump, I suppose?"

"I am very much obliged to you, my son. But as it happens, Miss Christie Fox does not look at all like an old frump; though your poor mother would of course, and must expect it—though not perhaps quite to be told of it. On the contrary, Miss Fox looks very bright and blooming, with her eyes like the sky itself, and her lovely hair flowing all down her shoulders."

"I had better go and see whether she has knocked for something. I need not go in of course. In fact I should not think of it, only just to pop my head inside the door, and then——"

"No, you won't pop it, sir, in any place of the kind. Remember that it is a bedroom; and you are a gentleman—or ought to be."

"Oh, come, mother! That's a little too hard on me. I never meant anything, except to save you trouble, by just asking— Well, I didn't think you would speak to me in that way."

"Well my boy, perhaps I spoke too hastily. Words turn so different, outside the lips! But I should not like a visitor of ours to think she had fallen among savages. But here comes your supper at last; and small thanks to Rosie. Why at her time of life, I should have been too proud to serve my only brother, hand and foot. But I must just run back, and get my young lady tucked up. High time for her to be in bed again. Her brother has sent her box full of things, and so we shall be able to get her out a bit to-morrow, if the weather permits, and Dr. Gronow."

Dr. Gronow permitted, and so did the weather. Can any man remember when he was stopped from making a fool of himself by the weather, or encouraged in any wisdom by it? How many a youth under vast umbrella, warranted to shelter two, if their shoulders came nice and close together, with the storm beating on them, and suggesting—but such umbrellas are not made now, fine canopies of whalebone—who would buy them? Who thinks of more than his own top-hat?

Unless he sees a chance of a gold-band round it. And that, to tell the truth, has been very charming always. But here was Frank Gilham, without any thought of that. He knew that

Jemmy Fox was a fine young fellow, perhaps a little bit above him in the social scale, and likely to be a wealthy man, some day. But of sweet Christie he knew nothing, except that he wanted to know a great deal.

Therefore he found that the young mare was puffing, and wanted wet bandages, and a day in stable—excess of synovial oil is a serious study. While on the other hand old *Tommy*, as hard and as dry as a brick-bat, was not altogether free from signs of rheumatism, and had scraped up his litter, in a manner that meant something. He put it to his mother, whether they should plough to-day. It might be all right, and the horses were hers. If she thought wise to venture it — –

"It is no use trying to persuade me, Frank," Mrs. Gilham answered; "I won't risk it. Your dear father lost a good horse once, although I advised him to the contrary. Under Providence, our first duty is to the faithful and long-suffering creatures, provided by Him for the benefit of mankind. You may try to persuade me, as much as you like. But you don't seem to have got your ploughing trousers on!"

"That is not a question of ten minutes. When I looked out of window, the first thing this morning——"

"Yes to be sure. You were considering the weather. Your dear father did the same; though always wrong about it. But it is useless to argue with me, Frank. I must have my own way, sometimes."

"Very well. Very well, then I won't go. I have got a lot of little things to see to here. Why the rack in the kitchen would soon be rack and ruin."

"Frank, you do say the very cleverest things. And I feel in myself that it never comes from me. Thank God that I have such a dutiful son, though his mind is so superior."

The young man exerted his superior mind upon a very solid breakfast, topped up with honey, gushing limpid from the comb, sweeter than the softest beeswing of the meed of love. Then he sauntered in the mow-yard with his ginger terrier Jack; whom no wedded love could equal, in aptitude to smell a rat. But hay was sweet, and clover sweeter, and the rich deep ricks of wheat—golden piles on silver straddles—showed the glossy stalk, and savoured of the glowing grain within. A man might thrust his arm into the yellow thicket here and there, and fetch the chined and plump ear out, and taste the concrete milkiness.

"Rose told me that I should just see her

eat," Frank Gilham meditated; "what a greedy thing to say! Was it because eggs are now so scarce, and Rose wanted all of them for herself? But if she likes good things, I could have this rick of brown wheat threshed to-morrow. The bread is ten times as sweet and toothsome—oh by the by, what teeth she has, like wind-flower buds among roses. Two or three times, her lips just showed them, while she was lying upon that hay. But what are her teeth to compare with her lips? And did anybody ever see such cheeks, even with the pink flown out of them? There's nothing that you could find a flaw in; forehead, hair, and eyes, and nose—though I can't pretend quite that I have seen her eyes yet—merely a sort of a flash in the air, while she was flying over the backrail of the trap. Only there is no denying that they must be like heaven itself, full of Angels. Mother says the sky, but that sounds so common. So far as that goes, everybody is allowed to look at the sky; but who would care ever to see it again, after a glimpse—Jack, what are you about there? Got into a gin? Well, serves you right for mooning."

"Frank! Frank! Frank!" A loud call rang among the ricks. "Got away smoking again, I'll be bound. I never can understand

how it is, he doesn't set every blessed rick on fire."

"Not smoking at all, as it happens. But how frightfully shrill your voice is, Rosie!"

"What a swell we are, to be sure, to-day! And getting quite nervous. Wants cotton wool in his ears, poor dear! But the precious young lady is just coming out. And mother says you should be somewhere handy, in case of her being taken faint. About as likely to faint as I am, I should say. Now mind your P's and Q's, in spite of all your Greek and Latin. You may make your bow, about ten miles off; but not to speak, until spoken to. That's right, flourish your hair up. But you needn't run twenty miles an hour."

On the gravel walk bordered by hollyhocks —now a row of gaunt sceptres without any crowns -the kind Mrs. Gilham was leading her guest, who did not require to be led at all, but was too well-bred to reject the friendly hand. Christie was looking a little delicate, and not quite up to the mark of her usual high spirits; but the man must have been very hard to please, who could find much fault on that score.

"Oh what a beautiful view you have!" she exclaimed, as the sun broke through the mist,

spreading Perle valley with a veil of purest pearl. "I had no idea it was such a lovely place. And the house, and the garden, and the glen that slopes away. Why that must be Perlycross tower in the distance, and that tall white house the rectory. Why, there's the bridge with seven lofty arches, and the light shining through them! More light than water, I should say. What on earth induced them to put such a mighty bridge across such a petty river? I dare say they knew best—but just look at the meadows, almost as green as they would be in May! No wonder you get such lovely butter. And the trees down the valley, just in the right places to make the most of themselves, and their neighbourhood. Why half of them have got their leaves on still, here nearly at the end of November—and such leaves too, gold, red, and amber, straw-colour, cinnamon, and russet!"

"And if you come up to that bench, my dear," replied Mrs. Gilham, as proud as Punch, at the praises of her native vale, "that bench at the top of our little orchard—my poor dear husband had such taste, he could find the proper place for everything—gravel-walk all the way, and nothing but a little spring to cross; why, there you can hear the key-bugle of the *Defiance!*

Punctual every day at half-past ten. We always set our kitchen clock by it. The Guard, as soon as he sees our middle chimney, strikes up as loud as ever he can blow, 'Oh the roast-beef of Old England,' or 'To glory we steer,' for the horses to be ready. So some people say; but I happen to know, that it is done entirely to please us. Because we sent cider out every day, when that hot week was, last summer."

"What a grateful man! Oh I must go and hear him. I do think there's nothing like gratitude. By the by, I am not acting up to that. I have never even seen your son, to thank him."

"Oh Miss Fox, it is not fair to him, for any young lady to try to do that. He has no opinion of anything he does; and the last time he saved a young lady's life, he ran away, because—because it wouldn't do to stay. You see, she had been at the very point of drowning, and the people on the bank declared that she came up three times. My son Frank never pulled his coat off—he would have despised himself, if he had stopped to do it—he jumped in, they said it was forty feet high, but there is no bank on the river (except the cliff the church stands on) much over five and twenty.

However, in he went, and saved her; and everybody said that she was worth £10,000, but carried away by the current. And from that day to this, we heard nothing more about it; and my son, who has a very beautiful complexion, blushes—oh he blushes so, if he only hears of it!"

"Oh, he is too good, Mrs. Gilham! It is a very great mistake, with the world becoming all so selfish. But I am not the young lady that went with the current. I go against the current, whenever I find any. And your son has had the courage to do the same, in the question of my dear brother. I say what I mean, you must understand, Mrs. Gilham. I am not at all fond of shilly-shally."

"Neither is my son, Miss Fox. Only he thinks so very little of himself. Why there he is! Hard at work as usual. Don't say a syllable of thanks, my dear; if he comes up to pull his hat off. He can stand a cannon-ball; but not to be made much of."

"Won't I though say 'thank you' to him? I am bound to consider myself, and not only his peculiar tendencies. Mr. Frank Gilham, do please to come here, if—I mean supposing you can spare just half-a-minute."

Frank had a fair supply of hard, as well as

soft, in his composition. He was five and twenty years old, or close upon it, and able to get a dog out of a trap, in the deepest of his own condition. He quitted his spade—which he had found, by the by, left out all night, though the same is high treason—as if he could scarcely get away from it, and could see nothing so fine as a fat spit of sod. And he kept his eyes full upon Christie's, as if he had seen her before, but was wondering where.

This was the proper thing to do. Though he knew himself to be in no small fright, throughout all this bravery. But there is no monopoly of humbug; though we all do our utmost to establish one.

"Miss Fox, I believe you have seen my son before." The old lady took to the spirit of the moment, with the quickness, in which ladies always take the front. "And my son Frank has had the honour of seeing you."

"And feeling me too—pretty sharp against his chest"—Christie thought within herself, but she only said—"Yes; and it was a happy thing for me."

"Not at all, Miss Fox—a mere casual accident, as the people about here express it. I explained to you, that Frank cannot help himself. Be kind enough not to speak of it."

"That won't do," replied Christie, looking steadfast. "It may do for him, but not for me. Allow me one moment, Mrs. Gilham."

Without more ado, she ran up to Frank Gilham, who was turning away again towards his work, and gave him both hands, and looked full at him, with the glitter of tears in her deep blue eyes.

"My senses have not quite forsaken me," she said; "and I know whom I have to thank for that; and in all probability for my life as well. It is useless to talk about thanking you, because it is impossible to do it. And even before that, I was deeply in your debt, for the very noble way in which you took my brother's part, when everybody else was against him. It was so brave, and generous of you."

It was more than she could do, with all her spirit, to prevent two large and liberal tears from obeying the laws of nature; in fact they were not far from obtaining the downright encouragement of a sob, when she thought of her poor brother.

"Well, you are a sweet simple dear!" exclaimed the fine old lady, following suit in the feminine line, and feeling for her pocket-handkerchief. "Frankie should be proud to his dying day, of doing any trifle for such a

precious dear. Why don't you say so, Frankie, my son?"

"Simply because my mother has said it so much better for me." He turned away his eyes, in fear of looking thus at Christie, lest they should tell her there was no one else in the world henceforth for them to see.

"Here comes the *Defiance!* Hurrah, hurrah!" shouted Rose, rushing in, for once just at the right moment. "I can hear the horses' hoofs springing up the rise. If you want to know anything about roast beef, you must put on a spurt up the periwinkle walk. Here goes number one. Slow coaches come behind."

"I am not a slow coach. At least I never used to be," cried Christie, setting off in chase.

"Miss Fox, Miss Fox, don't attempt to cross the brook, without my son's hand," Mrs. Gilham called after them; for she could not live the pace. "Oh Rose is wrong as usual—it's 'To glory we steer,' this time."

The obliging guard gave it three times over, as if he had this team also in full view; then he gave the "Roast beef," as the substance of the glory; and really it was finer than a locomotive screech.

Presently Rose heard the cackle of a pullet which had laid, and off she ran to make sure

of the result, because there was an old cock sadly addicted to the part that is least golden in the policy of Saturn. So the three who remained sat upon the bench and talked, with the cider apples piled in pink and yellow cones before them, and the mossy branches sparkling (like a weeping smile) above, and the sun glancing shyly, under eaves and along hedge-rows, like the man denied the privilege of looking at the horse. By this light however Frank Gilham contrived to get many a peep round his mother's bonnet—which being of the latest fashion was bigger than a well-kept hedge-row—at a very lovely object on the other side thereof, which had no fear as yet of being stolen.

Miss Fox had fully made up her mind, that (happen what might) she would not say a single word, to sadden her good hostess with the trouble her brother had fallen into, or the difficulties now surrounding him. But ladies are allowed to unmake their minds, especially if it enlarges them; and finding in the recesses of that long bonnet a most sympathetic pair of ears, all the softer for being "rather hard of hearing," and enriched with wise echoes of threescore years, she also discovered how wrong and unkind it would be, to withhold any heart-matter from them.

"And one of the most dreadful things of all," Christie concluded with a long-drawn sigh, "is that my dear father, who has only this son Jemmy, is now in such a very sad state of health, that if he heard of this it would most likely take him from us. Or if he got over it, one thing is certain, he would never even look at my brother again. Not that he would believe such a wicked thing of him; but because he would declare that he brought it on himself, by going (against his father's wishes) into this medical business. My father detests it; I scarcely know why, but have heard that he has good reason. We must keep this from him, whatever it costs us; even if it keeps poor Jemmy under this cloud for months to come. Luckily father cannot read now very well, and his doctor has ordered him not to read at all; and mother never looks at a newspaper; and the place being five and thirty miles away, and in another county, there is no great risk, unless some spiteful friend should rush in, to condole with him. That is what I dread to hear of sometimes; though good Dr. Freeborn, who attends him, will prevent any chance of it, if possible. But you see, Mrs. Gilham, how it cripples us. We cannot move boldly and freely, as we ought, and make the thing the

topic of the county; as we should by an action of libel for instance, or any strong mode of vindication. I assure you, sometimes I am ready to go wild, and fly out, and do anything. And then I recollect poor father."

"It is a cruel cruel thing, my dear. I never heard of anything resembling it before. That's the very thing that Frank says. From the very first he saw, what a shameful thing it was to speak so of Dr. Fox. I believe he has knocked down a big man or two; though I am sure I should be the last to encourage him in that."

"Come, mother, come! Miss Fox, you must not listen to a quarter of what mother says about me. I dare say, you have found that out, long ago."

"If so, it is only natural, and you deserve it;" this Hibernian verdict was delivered with a smile too bright to be eclipsed by a score of hedgerow bonnets; "but there is one thing I should like to ask Mr. Frank Gilham, with his mother's leave; and it is this—how was it that you Mr. Frank, almost alone of all the parish of Perlycross, and without knowing much of my brother at the time, were so certain of his innocence?"

"Because I had looked in his face;" replied

Frank, looking likewise into the sister's face, with a gaze of equal certainty.

"That is very noble;" Christie said, with a little toss meaning something. "But most people want more to go upon than that."

CHAPTER II.

DISCUSSION.

Now Mrs. Fox. Doctor Jemmy's mother, was an enthusiastic woman. She was twenty years younger than her husband, and felt herself fifty years his senior (when genuine wisdom was needed) and yet in enterprise fifty years junior. The velocity of her brain had been too much for the roots of her hair, as she herself maintained, and her best friends could not deny it. Except that the top of her head was snow-white, and she utterly scorned to disguise it, she looked little older than her daughter Christie, in some ways; though happily tougher. She was not too fat, and she was not too thin; which is more than most people can tell themselves, at the age of eight and forty. Into this ancient County race, which had strengthened its roots by banking, she had brought a fine vein of Devonian blood, very clearing for their complexions. She had shown some disdain for mercantile views; until

she began to know better, when her father, and others of her landed lineage slipped down the hilltop into bankruptcy, without any Free-trade, or even tenants' superior rights, to excuse them. Then she perceived that mercantile views are the only ones left to ensure a quiet man a fair prospect from his own front windows. She encouraged her husband to cherish the Bank, which at one time she had derided; and she quite agreed with him, that no advances could save her own relations in their march downhill.

The elder James Fox, who like his father had refused a title—for although they were not Quakers now, they held to their old simplicity—Mr. James Fox of Foxden was a fine sample of the unmixed Englishman. He had never owed a penny of his large fortune to any unworthy trick of trade, or even to lucky gambling in stocks, or bitter mortgages. Many people called him stubborn, and they were welcome to take that view of it. In business that opinion served him well, and saved a lot of useless trouble. But he himself knew well, and his wife knew even better, that though he would never budge an inch, for claim, or threat, or lawsuit, there was no man who gave a longer ell, when drawn out by mercy, or even gentle equity.

Now in the full vigour of his faculties, mental if not bodily—and the latter had not yet failed him much—that mysterious blow descended, which no human science can avert, relieve, or even to its own content explain. One moment he was robust and active, quick with the pulse of busy life, strong with the powers of insight, foresight, discrimination, promptitude—another moment, and all was gone. Only a numb lump remained, livid, pallid, deaf and dumb, sightless, breathless (beyond a wheezy snore) incapable even of a dream or moan. And knowing all these things, men are proud!

His strong heart, and firm brain, bore him through; or rather they gradually shored him up; a fabric still upon the sands of time, but waiting only for the next tidal wave.

Now the greatest physician, or metaphysician, that ever came into the world, can tell us no more than an embryo could, what the relics of the mind will be in such a case, or how far in keeping with its former self. Thoroughly pious men have turned blasphemers; very hard swearers have taken to sweet hymns; tempers have been changed from diabolical to angelic; but the change more often has been the other way. Happily for himself, and all about him, this fine old man was weakened

only, and not perverted from his former healthful self. His memory was deranged, in veins and fibres, like an ostrich-plume draggled in a gale of wind and rain; but he knew his old friends, and the favoured of his heart, and before and above all, his faithful wife. He had fallen from his pride, with the lapse of other powers; and to those who had known him in his stronger days, his present gentleness was touching, and his gratitude for trifles affecting; but notwithstanding that, he was sometimes more obstinate than ever.

"I wonder why Chris stays away so long;" he said as he sat one fine day upon the terrace, for he was ordered to stay out of doors as much as possible, and his wife as usual sat beside him. "She is gone to nurse Jemmy through a very heavy cold, as I understood you to say, my dear. But my memory is not always quite clear now. But it must be some days since I heard that; and I miss little Chrissy with her cheerful face. You are enough of course, my dear Mary, and I very seldom think much of anybody else. Still I long sometimes to see my little Chrissy."

"To be sure; and so do I. The house seems very sad without her;" replied Mrs. Fox, as if it could be merry now. "We won't give

her more than another day or two. But we must remember, dear, how differently poor Jemmy is placed from what we are in this comfortable house. Only one old rough Devonshire servant; and everybody knows what they are—a woman who would warm his bed, as likely as not, with a frying-pan, and make his tea out of the rain water boiler."

"He has no one to thank for it but himself."

After this delivery, the father of the family shut his mouth, which he still could do as well as ever, though one of his arms hung helpless.

"And I did hear that there was some disturbance there, something I think about the clergyman, who is a great friend of Jemmy's;" Mrs. Fox spoke this in all good faith, for Dr. Freeborn had put this turn upon a story, which had found its way into the house; "and you know what our Chris is, when she thinks any one attacks the Church—you may trust her for flying to the rescue. At any rate so far as money goes."

"And money goes a long way, in matters eccles—you know what I mean—I can't pronounce those long words now. Christie is too generous with her good aunt's money. The trustees let her have it much too freely. I should not be much surprised if they get a

hundred pounds out of Chris, at—let me see, what is the place called—something like a brooch or trinket. Ah there, it's gone again!"

"You must not talk so much, my dear; and above all you must not try your memory. It is wonderfully good, I am sure, thank God! I only wish mine was half as good."

Now Mrs. Fox was quite aware that she had an exceedingly fine memory.

"Well, never mind;" resumed the invalid, after roving among all the jewels he could think of. "But I should be very glad before I die, to see Chrissy married to Sir Henry Haggerstone, a man of the highest character, as well as a very fine estate. Has he said anything to you about it lately?"

"No, father;" Mrs. Fox always called him "father," when a family council was toward; "how could he, while you—I mean why should he be in such a hurry? Christie is a girl who would only turn against him, if he were to worry her. She is a very odd child; she is not like her mother. A little spice of somebody else, I think, who has always contrived to have his own way. And she hates the idea of being a stepmother; though there are only two little girls after all, and Chrissy's son would be the heir of course. She says it is

so frightfully unromantic, to marry a wealthy widower. But talk of the—I am sure I beg his pardon—but here comes Sir Henry himself, with Dr. Freeborn. You had better see the Doctor first, my dear, while I take a turn with Sir Henry."

This gentleman was, as Mr. Fox had pronounced, of the very highest character, wealthy moreover, and of pleasant aspect, and temper mild and equable. Neither was his age yet gone fatally amiss; though a few years off would have improved it, as concerning Christie; for he was not more than thirty-three, or thirty-four, and scarcely looked that, for he led a healthful life. But his great fault was, that he had no great fault; nothing extreme in any way about him, not even contempt for "extreme people." He had been at Oxford, and had learned, by reading for a first class in classics (which he got), that virtue is a "habit of fore-choice, being in the mean that concerns ourselves, defined by reason, and according as the man of perception would define it."

Sir Henry was a man of very clear perception, and his nature was well-fitted to come into definitions. He never did much thinking of his own; for deeper minds had saved him

all that trouble, and he was quite content to accept the results. There was nobody who could lead him much, and no one who could not lead him a little, when he saw a clear path to go along. This was not altogether the man to enchant romantic maidenhood.

Christie cared for him about as much as she would for a habit, that was in a mean. Not that he was in any way a prig, or laid down the law to any one. He had not kept up his Classics, for he had no real love for them; and in those days, a man might get a first at Oxford, who could scarcely scan a Latin hexameter, if he were exceptionally strong in "Science"—then meaning Philosophy, before the age of "Stinks." To none of these subjects did Christie pay heed—she did not care for the man; and that was all about it.

"You are quite right, Mrs. Fox. I think exactly as you do;" this gentleman was replying to the lady of the house, as they walked upon the gentle slope towards the flower-garden; "there are no real Whigs, in the present headlong days. Men, like your husband, and myself, who have fancied ourselves in the happy mean, are either swept aside, or carried down the deluge. For the moment there seems to be a slight reaction; but

it will not last. The rush will only be more headlong. And in private life it is just the same. Individual rights are to be no more respected. Everything belongs to everybody. I will tell you a little thing that happened to myself, just as a specimen of the spirit of the age. A year or two ago, I bought some old manorial rights, in a thinly peopled part of Devonshire; in fact at the Western end of the great Blackdown Range, a barren, furzy, flinty sort of place. By the by, not many miles away from the place where your son has gone to live—Perlycross. I only bought the manor to oblige a friend, who wanted a little ready money, and to go there now and then perhaps for a little rough shooting, for the country is beautiful, and the air very fine. Well, the manorial rights included some quarries, or pits, or excavations of some sort, where those rough scythe-stones are dug, such as you see lying on that lawn. The land itself was actually part of the manor, from a time beyond memory or record; but it seems as if strangers had been allowed to settle on the hillside, and work these ancient quarries, and sell the produce on their own account, only paying a small royalty to the manor, every Martinmas, or about that time; not so much for the value of the money,

(though it would perhaps be considerable under a proper computation) but as an acknowledgment of the ownership of the manor. But I fear I am tiring you."

"Not at all, Sir Henry; I like any story of that sort. Our laws are so very very queer."

"Sometimes they are. Well, my friend had not deceived me. He said that this Whetstone money was very hard to get, and was so trifling that he had let it go sometimes, when the people objected to paying it, as they did after any bad season. Last Martinmas, the matter slipped my memory, through domestic trouble. But this year, as the day approached, I sent orders to a man, (a rough sort of Game-keeper, who lives near there, and looks after the shooting and gravel and peat,) to give notice at the pits that I meant to have my money. A very close corporation they seem to have established, and have made their encroachments uncommonly secure, being quite distinct in race, and character, dialect, and even dress, I believe, from the settled people round them. Now what message do you think they sent me?"

"Something very insolent, I have no doubt." Mrs. Fox did not call herself even a Whig, but a downright determined Tory.

"This was it—my man got the schoolmaster

to put it into writing, and I happen to have it in my pocket. 'Not a penny will we pay this year. But if you like to come yourself, and take a turn at the flemmer'—something they use for getting out the stone—'we won't charge you anything for your footing.'"

"Your footing on your own land! Well, that is very fine. What do you mean to do, Sir Henry?"

"Grin, and bear it, I suppose, Mrs. Fox. You know what the tendency of the time is, even in the Law-courts. And of course, all the Press would be down upon me, as a monster of oppression, if I ventured to assert my rights. And though I am out of the House ever since the "Broom of Reform" (as the papers call it) swept my two little seats away, I might like to stand again some day; and what a Whetstone this would be for my adversaries! And I hear that these people are not a bad lot, rough, and uncivilized, and wonderfully jealous over the 'rights' they have robbed me of; but among themselves faithful, and honest, and quiet, and sober, which is the strangest thing of all in England. As for their message, why they speak out plainly, and look upon their offer as a great concession to me. And we in this more enlightened part must allow for the

manners of that neighbourhood. In fact this is such a perfect trifle, after what they have been doing at Perlycross. If I were a Magistrate about there——"

"At Perlycross! What do you mean? Some little matter about the clergyman? I want to know all about that, Sir Henry. It seems so strange, that Christie never mentioned it."

Sir Henry perceived that he had "put his foot in it." Dr. Freeborn had warned him that the "Sacrilege in Devon"—as the Somerset papers had begun to call it—must be kept most carefully from the knowledge of his patient, and from that of the lady also; for there was no saying how she might take it. And now Mrs. Fox could not fail to find out everything. He was ready to bite off his tongue, as ladies put it.

"Oh, ah—I was thinking of something—which had better not be referred to perhaps. Not quite fit to be discussed, when one has the honour of being with ladies. But about those very extraordinary people. I have heard some things that are highly interesting, things that I am certain you would like to hear——"

"Not half so much as I want to hear the story about the parish, where my son lives, and my daughter is staying, and will not come

back—for some reason which we cannot make out. I must insist, Sir Henry, upon hearing all that you know. I am not a young woman, and know the world pretty well by this time. You will not offend me, by anything you say; but you will, by anything you hide."

Sir Henry Haggerstone looked about, and saw that he was in for it. The elderly lady—as some might call her—looked at him, with that pretty doubt, which ladies so thoroughly understand how to show, and intend to be understood without expression. The gentleman glanced at her; he had no moustache to stroke—for only cavalry officers, and cads of the most pretentious upturn, as yet wore ginger hackles—a relief still to come in a downier age.

"My dear Mrs. Fox, there is nothing improper, from a lady's point of view, I mean, in the very sad occurrence at Perlycross. It is a question for the local authorities. And not one for me to meddle with."

"Then why did you speak of it? Either tell me all; or say that you won't, and leave me to find out." The lady had the gentleman, the Tory had the temporiser, on the nail.

"We are nothing in your hands;" he murmured, and with perfect truth; for when

the question comes to the pulling out of truth, what chance has a man against a clever woman, ten times as quick as he is, and piercing every glance?

"I am truly sorry that it has come to this;" Mrs. Fox did not sympathise with his regret, but nodded, as if to say—"no cure now for that; for my part, I am rather glad." "It was simply through terror of distressing you, that all your best friends have combined, as I may say, at least have thought it wiser——"

"Then they made a great mistake. And I am not at all thankful to any of them. Let me sit down here. And now for all this frightful wonder! Is Jemmy dead? Let me have the worst at once."

This was a sudden relief to Sir Henry, enabling him to offer immediate comfort, and to whisper—"how could you imagine such a thing?"

"No my dear madam," he continued, having now the upper hand, and hers beneath it, "I have the pleasure of assuring you that your noble son is in the very best of health, and improving by his admirable knowledge of medicine the health of all around him. It is acknowledged that he has advanced the highest interests of the Profession."

"That he was sure to do, Sir Henry. And he has a copy of my dear grandmother's recipe for the pounded cherry-stone elixir."

"With all the resources of modern science added, and his own trained insight in their application. But the worst of it is, that these leading intellects, as you must have experienced long ago, can never escape a sad amount of narrow professional jealousy. Your son must have fallen among those heavy-witted Devonshire doctors, like a thunderbolt—or worse, a phenomenon come to heal their patients *gratis*."

"That would drive them to do anything—to poison him, if they had the courage. For every one knows how they run up their bills."

Having brought the lady thus to the practical vein, Sir Henry (as gently as possible, and as it were by the quarter-drachm) administered the sombre draught he was now bound to exhibit. Jemmy's dear mother took it with a closeness of attention, and critical appreciation, seldom found in the physical recipients in such cases. But to the administrator's great surprise, her indignation was by no means vivid, in the direction anticipated.

"I am heartily glad that I know this at last. I ought to have been told of it long ago;" said

Mrs. Fox, looking resolutely at Sir Henry Haggerstone. "A very great mistake, and want of judgment on the part of Dr. Freeborn. What a frightful risk to run—supposing my husband had been told suddenly of this!"

"All has been done for the best, my dear madam. The great anxiety was to keep it from him."

"And who was the proper one, to see to that? I should have thought, his wife and constant nurse. Was it thought impossible that I should show discretion? Clever men always make one great mistake. They believe that no woman can command her tongue. If they had their own only half as well controlled, there would not be a tenth part of the mischief in the world."

"You are quite right there. That is a very great truth, and exceedingly well expressed;" replied Sir Henry, not that he was impressed with it so deeply, but that he wanted to appease the lady. "However, as regards Dr. Freeborn's ideas, I really know very little; no doubt he thought it was for your own good too, not to be burdened at such a time with another great anxiety."

"He has taken too much upon himself. It would have been no great anxiety to me. My

son is quite capable of fighting his own battles. And the same orders issued to my son and daughter! At last I can understand poor Christie's letters—why she has been so brief, for fear of losing all self-control, like her mother. Stupid, stupid, clever men! Why there is infinitely less chance now of Mr. Fox ever knowing it. You may tell our sapient doctor that. Perhaps I shall astonish him a little. I'll prove to him that I can control my tongue, by never mentioning the subject to him."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Fox, if I make one or two remarks. May I speak without reserve, as an old friend of the family, and one who has had a great deal to do with criminal—at least I mean to say with public proceedings in this county?"

"To be sure, Sir Henry. I shall be much obliged by any suggestions you may make."

"In the first place then, it is quite impossible to leave your son under this imputation. I can quite understand how he has been impeded in taking any steps for his own vindication, by his sense of duty towards his father and yourself. In that respect, his behaviour has been most admirable. He has absolutely done nothing; not even protested publicly, and challenged any evidence against him, but been quite

content to lie at the mercy of any wicked slanderers. And for this there can be no reason but one—that public proceedings would increase the stir, and make it certain that the whole must come to his father's knowledge."

"To be sure, Sir Henry. There can be no other reason." The old friend of the family was surprised at the tone in which Mrs. Fox uttered this opinion.

"Of course not. And so it is all the more incumbent upon his family to clear him. Let me tell you what I should do, if I were his father, in sound health, and able to attend to business. Of course I am too young to speak so"—he had suddenly remembered Christie—"but that you understand; and you also admit that I am not likely to offer advice, unless asked for."

"I beg you particularly to give it. You are a Magistrate of large, if not long, experience. And I know that you are our true friend."

"That you may rely upon, Mrs. Fox. And you know how much I admire your son; for enthusiasm is a rare gift now, and becoming rarer every year, in these days of liberal sentiment. If the case were my own, I should just do this. I should make application at once to the Court of King's Bench, to have the

matter sifted. It is no use shilly-shallying with any County Authorities. A Special Commission has been granted in cases less important. But without pressing for that, it is possible to get the whole question investigated by skilled officers from head-quarters. Those who bring the charge should have done it, and probably would have done it, if they had faith in their own case. But they are playing a deeper game; according at least to my view of the matter. They have laid themselves open to no action. Your son lies helpless, and must 'live it down;' as people say glibly, who have never had to do it. Is this a thing you mean to allow?"

"You need scarcely ask me that, Sir Henry. But remember that I know nothing of the particulars, which have been kept so—so amiably from my knowledge."

"Yes. But I know them all—at least so far as they can be gathered from the Devonshire Journals, and these are very careful what they say. In spite of all the enemies who want to keep it going, the whole thing may be brought to a point at once, by applying for a warrant in the Court of King's Bench, with the proper information sworn. They would grant it at once. Your son would appear, and be released

of course on bail; for the case is only one of misdemeanour. Then the proper officers would be sent down, and the real criminals detected."

"A warrant against my Jemmy! Oh, Sir Henry, you can never mean that."

"Simply as a matter of form, Mrs. Fox. Ask your solicitors. They are the proper people. And they should have been consulted long ago, and would have been, but for this terrible disadvantage. I only suggest the quickest way to bring the matter to an issue. Otherwise the doubt will hang over your son, with his friends and his conscience to support him. And what are these among so many?"

This was not altogether a counsel of perfection, or even of a very lofty view; but unhappily we have to contend with a world neither perfect nor very lofty. There was no other hole to be found in the plan, or even to be picked by the ingenuity of a lady. But who that is worthy of that name cannot slip round the corner gracefully, whatever is presented?

"I thank you so deeply, Sir Henry, for your very kind interest in this strange matter," said Mrs. Fox, looking all gratitude, with a smile that shone through tears; "and for your perfectly invaluable advice. You see everything so distinctly, and your experience is so precious.

To think of my poor boy in such a position! Oh dear, oh dear! I really have not the courage to discuss it any more. But a kind heart like yours will make every allowance for the feelings of a mother."

Thus was Sir Henry neatly driven from the hall of council to the carpeted chamber of comfort. But he knew as well as if the lady had put it into so many words, that she meant to accept none of his advice. Her reason, however, for so resolving was far beyond his perception, simple as it was and natural.

Mrs. Fox had known little of the young doctor's doings, since he had settled at Perlycross, having never even paid him a visit there, for her husband was sore upon that subject. So that she was not acquainted with the depth of Jemmy's regard for Sir Thomas, and had never dreamed of his love for Inez; whereas she was strongly and bitterly impressed with his lifelong ardour for medical research. The mother felt no indignant yearning for prompt and skilled inquiry; because she suspected, in the bottom of her heart, that it would prove her son the criminal.

CHAPTER III.

BLACKMARSH.

A LONG way back among the Blackdown Hills, and in nobody knows what parish, the land breaks off into a barren stretch, uncouth, dark, and desolate. Being neither hill nor valley, slope nor plain, morass nor woodland, it has no lesson for the wanderer, except that the sooner he gets out of it the better. For there is nothing to gratify him if he be an artist, nothing to interest him if his tastes are antiquarian, nothing to arouse his ardour, even though he were that happy and most ardent creature, a naturalist free from rheumatism. And as for any honest fellow mainly concerned with bread and butter, his head will at once go round with fear and with looking over his shoulders. For it is a lonesome and gruesome place, where the weather makes no difference; where Nature has not put her hand, on this part or on that, to leave a mark or show a preference, but slurred the whole with one black frown of desolate monotony.

That being so, the few and simple dwellers on the moorland around, or in the lowland homesteads, might well be trusted to keep their distance from this dreary solitude. There were tales enough of hapless travellers last seen going in this direction, and never in any other; as well as of spectral forms, low groans, and nightly processions through the air.

Not more than a hundred years ago, there had been a wicked baronet, profane, rapacious, arrogant, blackhearted, foul, and impious. A blessed curate prayed him not to hunt on Holy Friday. He gave the blessed curate taste of whip-thong from his saddle; then blew seven blasts of his horn, to proclaim that he would hunt seven days in every week, put spurs to his black horse, and away. The fox, disturbed on Holy Friday, made for this "Forbidden land;" which no fox had ever done before. For his life he plunged into it, feeling for the moment that nothing could be worse than to be torn in pieces. The hounds stopped, as if they were turned to stone in the fury of their onslaught. The huntsman had been left far behind, having wife and family. But the wicked baronet cracked his whip, blew three blasts on his horn, leaned forward on his horse and gave him the rowel. The hounds in a frenzy threw up their sterns,

and all plunged headlong into it. And ever since that, they may be seen (an hour after sun-down, on every Sunday of the season, and any Holy Friday) in full cry scouring through the air, with the wicked baronet after them, lashing his black horse, and blowing his horn, but with no fox in front to excuse them.

These facts have made the Forbidden land, or the Blackmarsh, as some call it, even less desirable than its own complexion shows it. And it is so far from Perlycross, that any man on foot is tired by the time he gets there, and feels that he has travelled far enough, and in common sense must go home again.

But there was one Perlycrucian now—by domicile, not nativity—of tireless feet, and reckless spirit, too young for family ties, and too impetuous for legends. By this time he was admitted to the freedom of every hedge and ditch in the parish, because he was too quick to be caught, and too young to be prosecuted. "Horatio Peckover" was his name, by usage cut short into "Hopper"; a lad in advance of his period, and the precursor of all "paper-chases."

Like many of those who are great in this line, he was not equally strong in the sedentary uses of that article. Mr. Penniloe found him

so far behind, when pen and ink had to be dealt with, that he put him under the fine Roman hand of Sergeant Jakes, the schoolmaster. Jakes was not too richly endowed by a grateful country, for years of heroism; neither was his stipend very gorgeous, for swinging cane in lieu of gun. Sixpence an hour was his figure, for pen-drill of private pupils, and he gladly added Hopper to the meagre awkward-squad.

Soon an alliance of the closest kind was formed; the veteran taking warm interest in the spirited sallies of youth, and the youth with eager thirst imbibing the fine old Peninsular vintage of the brightest ruby, poured forth in the radiance of a yellow tallow candle. For the long school-room was cleared at night of coats, and hats, and green-baize bags, cracked slates, bead-slides, and spelling-books, and all the other accoutrements, and even toys of the youthful Muse; and at seven o'clock Horatio stepped across the road from the rectory, sat down at the master's high black desk, and shouldered arms for the copy-drill. The Sergeant was famed for his flourishes, chiefly of his own invention, and had promised to impart that higher finish, when the fancy capitals were mastered.

"What a whack of time it does take, Sergeant!" cried Hopper, as he dipped his pen, one Friday night. "Not half so bad as Latin though, and there is something to look at afterwards. Capitals almost captured now. Ah, you have taken the capitals of many a country, Sergeant. Halloa! 'Xerxes was conqueror at Marathon,' to-night! Sergeant, are you quite sure of that? I thought it was another fellow, with a longer name—Milly, Tilly, something."

"No, Master Hopper; if it had been, we must have passed him long ago, among the big M's."

"To be sure. What a muff I was, not to think of that! I beg your pardon, Sergeant. There's scarcely anything you don't know."

"I had that on the highest authority—right elbow more in to your side, sir, if you please—that Xerxes copy was always set by commanding officer at Turry Vardoes—could not tell what to do with the men at night—so many ordered to play at nine-pins, and so many told off to learn roundhand. If it had not been for that, sir, I should never have been equal to my present situation."

"Then it must have been Xerxes, Sergeant. And after all, how can it matter, when it happened so long ago? A blot again! D—n it."

"Master Hopper, I am very sorry, but it is my duty to reprimand you, for the use of profane language. Never permitted, sir, in school-hours. Would you do it, before Mr. Penniloe?"

"I should rather hope not. Wouldn't old Pen stare? And then he'd be down upon me, like the very—capital D. Sergeant, pray excuse me; I only thought of him, without any name. I suppose we may call him 'Old Nick' though, without having to go to him, for doing it. I never could see what the difference was. But, my eye, Sergeant, I expected to see the old chap yesterday, cloven hoof, tail, eyes of fire, and everything!"

"What do you mean, sir? Where was he? Not in Perlycross, I hope." Sergeant Jakes glanced down the long dark room, and then at the pegs where his French sword was hanging.

"No, not here. He daren't come so near the church. But in the place where he lives all day, according to the best authorities. You have heard of Blackmarsh, haven't you? No marsh at all—that's the joke of it—but the queerest place I ever saw in all my life. Criky jimminy, but it is a rum un!"

"You don't mean to say you were there, sir!" The Sergeant took his hand from

Hopper's shoulder, and went round to see whether he was joking.

"To be sure I was, as large as life, and twice as natural! Had a holiday, as you know, and got leave off from dinner. Mother Muggridge gave me grub enough to go to Halifax. I had been meaning to go there ever so long, because everybody seems to funk it so. Why there's nothing there to be afraid of; though it makes you look about a bit. And you aren't sorry to come out of it."

"Did you tell Mr. Penniloe, you had been there, Master Hopper?"

"Sergeant, do you see any green in my eye?" Horatio dropped his pen, and enlarged the aperture of one eye, in a style very fashionable just then, but never very elegant.

"No sir, I can't answer fairly that I do. And I don't believe there ever was much, even when you was a babby."

"Mum's the word, you see then--even to old Muggridge, or she might be fool enough to let out. But I say, Sergeant, I've got a little job for you to do. Easy enough. I know you won't refuse me."

"No sir, that I won't. Anything whatever that lays in my power, Master Hopper."

"Well, it's only this—just to come with me

to-morrow—half-holiday, you know, and I can get off plum-duffs—always plum-duffs on a Saturday, and you should just see Pike pitching into them—and we'll give the afternoon to it, and examine Blackmarsh pretty thoroughly."

"Blackmarsh, Master Hopper! The Forbidden land—where Sir Robert upon his black horse, and forty hounds in full cry before him, may be seen and heard, sweeping through the air, like fiends!"

"Oh, that's all my eye and Betty Martin! Nobody believes that, I should hope. Why Sergeant, a man who knows all about Xerxes, and has taken half the capitals in Europe—oh, I say, Sergeant, come, you are not afraid now; and a fellow of sixteen, like me, to go there all by myself, and stop—well, nearly half-an-hour!"

"Afraid! Not I. No certainly not, after mountains, and forests, and caverns, and deserts. But the distance, Master Hopper, for a man of my age, and troubled with rheumatism in the knee-joint."

"Oh, that's all right! I have planned out all that. Of course I don't expect you to go ten miles an hour. But Baker Channing's light cart goes, every other Saturday, to Crooked-post quarry, at the further end of Hagdon, to fetch

back furze enough to keep his oven going, from a stack he bought there last summer. To-morrow is his day; and you have no school, you know, after half-past ten or eleven. You ride with old Tucker to the Crooked-post, and come back with him, when he is loaded up. It shan't cost you a farthing. I have got a shilling left, and he shall have it. It is only two miles, or so, from Crooked-post to this end of Blackmarsh; and there you will find me waiting. Come, you can't get out of that."

"But what do you want me there for, sir? Of course, I'd go anywhere you would venture, if I could see any good in it."

"Sergeant, I'll tell you what. You thought a great deal of Sir Thomas Waldron, didn't you?"

"More than of any man that ever lived, or ever will see the light of this wicked world."

"And you didn't like what was done to him, did you?"

"Master Hopper, I tell you what. I'd give ten years off my poor life, if I could find out who did it."

"Then I fancy I have found out something about it. Not much, mind; but still something, and may come to more, if we follow it up. And if you come to-morrow, I'll show you what

it is. You know that my eyes are pretty sharp, and that I wasn't born yesterday. You know who it was that found 'Little Billy.' And you know who wants to get Fox out of this scrape, because he is a Somerset man, and all that, and doesn't deserve this trouble. And still more, because——"

"Well, Master Hopper, still more, because of what?"

"I don't mind telling you something, Sergeant—you have seen a lot of the world, you know. Because Jemmy Fox has got a deuced pretty sister."

"Oh come, Master Hopper, at your time of life! And not even got into the flourishes!"

"It doesn't matter, Jakes. I may seem rather young to people who don't understand the question. But that is my own business, I should hope. Well, I shall look out for you to-morrow. Two o'clock at the latest."

"But why shouldn't we tell Dr. Fox himself, and get him to come with us? That seems the simplest thing."

"No. There are very good reasons against that. I have found this out; and I mean to stick to it. No one would have dreamed of it, except for me. And I won't have it spoiled, by every nincompoop poking his nose into it.

Only if we find anything more, and you agree with me about it, we will tell old Pen, and go by his opinion."

"Very well, sir. It all belongs to you; as it did to me, when I was first after Soult's arrival to discover the advance of the French outposts. You shall have the credit, though I didn't. Anything more, sir? The candle is almost out."

"Sergeant, no more. Unless you could manage—I mean, unless you should think it wise to bring your fine old sword with you. You say there is no such piece of steel——"

"Master Hopper, there is no such piece, unless it was Lord Wellington's. They say he had one that he could lean on—not a dress-sword, not flummery, but a real workman—and although he was never a heavy man, a stone and a half less than I was then, it would make any figure of the multiplication-table that he chose to call for, under him. But I mustn't carry arms in these days, Master Hopper. I shall bring a bit of Spanish oak, and trust in the Lord."

On the following day, the sun was shining pretty well for the decrepitude of the year. There had been no frost to speak of, since that first sharp touch about three weeks back. The

air was mild, and a westerly breeze played with the half ripe pods of gorse, and the brown welting of the heather. Hopper had brought a long wand of withy, from the bank of the last brook he had leaped, and he peeled it with his pocket-knife, and sat (which he seldom did when he could help it) on a tuft of rush, waiting for the Sergeant. He stretched his long wiry legs, and counted the brass buttons on his yellow leathern gaiters, which came nearly to his fork, and were made fast by narrow straps to his brace-buttons.

This young man—as he delighted to be called—had not many grievances, because he ran them off so fast; but the two he chiefly dwelt upon, in his few still moments, were the insufficiency of cash and calf. For the former he was chiefly indebted to himself, having never cultivated powers of retention; for the deficiency of calves, however, nature was to blame, although she might plead not unfairly that they were allowed no time to grow. He regarded them now with unmerited contempt, and slapped them in some indignation, with the supple willow wand. It might well be confessed that they were not very large, as is often the case with long-distance runners; but for all that they were as hard as nails, and endowed with

knobs of muscle, tough and tense as coiled mainspring. In fact there was not a bit of flabby stuff about him; and his high clear colour, bright eyes, and ready aspect made him very pleasant to behold, though his nose was rather snubby, and his cheek-bones high, and his mouth of too liberal aperture.

"Come along, Sergeant, what a precious time you have taken!" Hopper shouted, as the angular outline of the veteran appeared at last in a gap between two ridges. "Why, we shall scarcely have two hours of good daylight left. And how do you know that Tucker won't go home without you?"

"He knows a bit better than that," replied Jakes, smiling with dark significance. "Master Hopper, I've got three of Tucker's boys in Horseshoe. Tucker is bound to be uncommon civil."

Now the "Horseshoe" was a form in the school at Perlycross especially adapted for corporal applications, snug as a cockpit, and affording no possibility of escape. And what was still better, the boys of that class were in the very prime of age for attracting, as well as appreciating, healthy and vigorous chastisement; all of them big enough to stand it, none of them big enough to kick, and for the most

part newly trouser'd into tempting chubbiness. Truly it might be said, that the parents of playful boys in the "Horseshoe" had given hostages to education.

"But bless my heart—what—what?" continued the ancient soldier, as he followed the rapid steps of Hopper, "why, I don't like the look of this place at all. It looks so weist—as we say about here, so unwholesome, and strange, and ungodly, and—and so timoursome."

"It is ever so much worse further on; and you can't tell where you are at all. But to make sure of our coming back, if—if there should be nothing to prevent us, I have got this white stick ready, and I am going to fix it on the top of that clump. There now, we shall be able to see that for miles."

"But we are not going miles I hope, Master Hopper. I'm a little too stiff for such a walk as that. You don't know what it is to have a pain in your knee."

"Oh don't I? I come down on it often enough. But I don't know exactly how far we are going. There is nothing to measure distance by. Come along, Sergeant! We'll be just like two flies going into one of your big ink-pots."

"Don't let me lose sight of you, Master Hopper. I mean, don't you lose sight of me.

You might want somebody to stand by you. It is the darkest bit of God's earth I ever did see. And yet nothing overhead to darken it. Seems almost to make its own shadow. Good Lord! what was that came by me?"

"Oh, a bat, or an owl, or a big dor-beetle; or it might be a thunder-bolt—just the sort of place for them. But what a bad place it is for finding things!"

There could scarcely have been a worse one, at least upon dry and unforested land. There was no marsh whatever, so far as they had come, but a dry uneven shingly surface, black as if fire had passed over it. There was no trace however of fire, neither any substance sufficient to hold it, beyond the mere passage of a shallow flame. The blackness that covered the face of the earth, and seemed to stain the air itself, and heavily dim the daylight, was of something unknown upon the breezy hills, or in the clear draught of a valley. It reflected no light, and received no shadow, but lay like the strewing of some approach to quarters undesirable. Probably from this (while unexamined by such men as we have now), the evil repute of the place had arisen, going down generations of mankind, while the stuff at the bottom renewed itself.

This stuff appeared to be the growth of some lanky trailing weed, perhaps some kind of *Persicaria*, but unusually dense and formless, resembling what may be seen sometimes, at the bottom of a dark watercourse, where the river slides without a wrinkle, and trees of thick foliage overhang it. And the same spread of life, that is more like death, may be seen where leagues of laver strew the foreshore of an Atlantic coast, when the spring-tides are out, and the winds gone low.

"By George, here we are at last. Thought I should never have made it out, in the thick of this blessed cobobbery," shouted Hopper, stopping short and beckoning; "now, Sergeant, what do you say to that? Queer thing, just here, isn't it?"

The veteran's eyes, confused and weary with the long monotony, were dazzled by sudden contrast. Hitherto the dreary surface, uniform and trackless, had offered only heavy plodding, jarred by the jerk of a hidden stone sometimes, but never elastic. All the boundary-beaters of the parish, or even a regiment of cavalry, might have passed throughout, and left no trace upon the padded cumber. But here a glaring stripe of silver sand broke through the blackness, intensely white by contrast, though not to be

seen a few yards off, because sunk below the level. Like a crack of the ground from earthquake, it ran across from right to left, and beyond it all was black again.

The ancient soldier glanced around, to be sure that no surprise was meant; and then with his big stick tried the substance of the white material. With one long stride he could have reached the other side, but the caution of perilous days awoke.

"Oh there's nothing in that, and it is firm enough. But look here;" said his young companion, "this is what floors me altogether."

He pointed to a place where two deep tracks, as of narrow wheels, crossed the white opening; and between them were three little pits about the size and depth of a gallon saucepan. The wheel-tracks swerved to the left, as if with a jerk to get out of the sandy hollow, and one of the three footprints was deeper and larger than the other two.

"Truly this is the doing of the arch-enemy of mankind himself." Sergeant Jakes spoke solemnly, and yet not very slowly; for he longed to make off with promptitude.

"The doing, more likely, of those big thieves who couldn't let your Colonel rest in his grave.

Do you mean to turn tail upon them, Sergeant Jakes?"

"May the Lord turn His back upon me, if I do!" The veteran's colour returned to his face, and all thoughts of flight departed. "I would go to the ends of the world, Master Hopper, after any living man; but not after Satan."

"The Devil was in them. No doubt about that. But he made them do it for Him. Does Old Nick carry whipcord? You see how that was, don't you?"

The youth leaped across, and brought back the lash of a whip which he had concealed there. "Plain as a pikestaff, Sergeant. When the wheels plunged into this soft stuff, the driver must have lashed like fury, to make him spring the cart out again. Off came the old lash, and here it is. But wait a minute. I've got something more to show you, that spots the villains pretty plain."

"Well, sir," said Jakes, regarding Hopper with no small admiration, "you deserve your stripes for this. Such a bright young gent shouldn't be thrown away in the Church. I was just going to say—'how can we tell they did it?' Though none but thundering rogues would come here. Nothing can be clearer than that, I take it."

"Then you, and I, are thundering rogues. Got you there, Sergeant; by gum, I did! Now come on a few steps further."

They stepped out boldly, having far less fear of human than of superhuman agency; though better had they met Apollyon perhaps, than the wild men they were tracing. Within less than a furlong, they reached an opening where the smother of the black weeds fell away, and an open track was left once more. Here the cart-wheels could be traced distinctly, and at one spot something far more convincing. In the middle of the track a patch of firm blue clay arose above the surface, for a distance of perhaps some fifty yards; and on it were frequent impressions of the hoofs of a large horse, moving slowly. And of these impressions one (repeated four or five times, very clearly) was that of the near fore-foot, distinctly showing a broken shoe, and the very slope and jag of the fracture.

"What do you think of that now, Sergeant?" asked Hopper, as he danced in triumph, but took good care not to dance upon the clay. "They call me a hedger and ditcher, don't they? Well, I think I am a tracker too."

"Master Hopper, to my mind, you are an uncommonly remarkable young gent. The

multiplication-table may not be strongly in your line, sir. But you can put two and two together, and no fear to jump on top of them."

"Oh, but the bad luck of it, Sergeant! The good luck for them, and the shocking luck for me. I never came to old Pen's shop, you see, till a day or two after that wicked job was over. And then it took me a fortnight, or more, to get up the lay of the country, and all that. And I was out of condition for three days, with a blessed example in the Eton grammar, *Percontatorem fugito*, that frightened me no end, and threw me off the hooks. But I fancy, I am on the right hook now."

"That you are, sir, and no mistake. And a braver young man never came into a regiment, even in Sir Arthur's time. Sir, you must pitch away copy-books. Education is all very fine for those who can't do no better. But it spoils a young man, with higher gifts."

"Don't say a good word of me, till you know all," replied the candid Hopper. "I thought that I was a pretty plucky fellow, because I was all by myself, you understand, and I knew that no fellow could catch me, in a run across the open. But I'll show you where I was stodged off; and it has been on my conscience

ever since. Just come to that place, where the ground breaks off."

He led the way along a gentle slope, while the light began to fail behind them, until they stood upon the brink of a steep descent, with a sharp rise upon the other side. It was like the back-way to the bottom of a lime-kiln, but there was no lime for many leagues around. The track of cart-wheels was very manifest, and the bottom was dark with the approach of night.

"My turn, Master Hopper, to go first now. No wife, or family, and nought to leave behind." With these words spoken in a whisper, the Sergeant (who had felt much self-reproach, at the superior courage of a peaceful generation) began to go stiffly down the dark incline, waving his hand for the other to wait there.

"In for a penny, in for a pound. I can kick like winkin', though I can't fight much." With these words, the gallant Hopper followed, slowing his quick steps to the heavier march in front.

When they came to the bottom, they found a level space, with room enough to turn a horse and cart. It was getting very dusky where they stood, with the grim sides gathering round them, and not a tree or bush to give any sign

of life, but the fringe of the dominant black weed, like heavy brows, shagging the outlook. But on the left hand, where the steep fell back, was the mouth as of a cave scooped roughly. Within it, all was black with gloom, and the low narrow entrance showed little hospitality.

"I don't care a d—n," said Sergeant Jakes, forgetful of school discipline; "if there's any scoundrel there, I'll drag him out. If it's old Colonel's bones—well I'm not afraid of them."

There remained just light enough to show that the cart had been backed up to the entrance.

"Where you go, I go;" replied the dauntless Hopper; and into it they plunged, with their hearts beating high, but their spirit on fire for anything.

The sound of their steps, as they passed into the darkness, echoed the emptiness of the place. There was nothing to be felt, except rugged flinty sides, and the damp chill which gathered in their hair; and in the middle, a slab of broken stone, over which they stumbled into one another's arms. They had no means of striking a light; but as their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, they assured themselves that there was nothing more to learn, unless it

might be from some small object on the floor. There seemed to be no shelves, no sort of fixture, no recesses; only the bare and unoccupied cave.

"I tell you what," said Sergeant Jakes, as they stood in the open air again; "this has been a smuggler's store in the war-time; a natural cave, improved no doubt. What we thought to find is gone further on, I fear. Too late, Master Hopper, to do any more to-day, and perhaps too late to do any more at all. But we must come again with a light, if possible on Monday."

"Well, one thing we have proved—that the villains, whoever they were, must have come from up the country; perhaps as far off as the Mendip Hills. But keep it to yourself, till we have settled what to do. Not a word to Tucker, or the news will be all over Perlycross to-night. Come back to the hoof-marks, and I'll take a copy. If we could only find the impressions of the men's feet too! You see after all, that Joe Crang spoke the truth. And it was the discovery of his 'Little Billy' that led me on in this direction."

There was light enough still, when they came back to the clay-patch, to make a rough tracing of the broken shoe, on the paper in which the

youth had brought his bread and bacon; and even that great steeple-chaser was glad to go home in company, and upon a truss of furze, with a flour-sack to shield him from the stubs and prickles.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRESHIP AND GALLEON.

Meanwhile, the fair Christie was recovering nerve so fast, and established in such bouncing health again, by the red-wheat bread of White Post farm, that nothing less would satisfy her than to beard—if the metaphor applies to ladies—the lion in the den, the arch-accuser, in the very court of judgment. In a word, she would not rest until she stood face to face with Lady Waldron. She had thought of it often, and became quite eager in that determination, when her brother related to her what had passed, in his interview with Miss Waldron.

Truly it was an enterprise of great pith, for a fair young English girl, to confront the dark majestic foreign lady, stately, arrogant, imperious, and above all, embittered with a cruel wrong, fierce, malignant, rancorous. But for all that, Christie was resolved to do it; though perfectly aware that the Spanish lady would

never be "at home" to her, if she could help it.

For this reason, and this alone, as she positively assured herself, did Miss Fox make so long a stay with Mrs. Gilham, the while she was quite well enough to go back to Old Barn, and the path of duty led her to her brother's side. But let her once return to that side, and all hope would be lost of arranging an encounter with the slanderer; inasmuch as Dr. Jemmy would most sternly interdict it. Her good hostess, all the while, was only too glad to keep her; and so was another important member of the quiet household; and even the flippant Rosie was delighted to have such patterns. For Miss Fox had sent for a large supply of dresses, all the way to Foxden, by the key-bugleman of the *Defiance;* because it would save such a vast amount in carriage, while one was so near the Great Western road. "I can't understand it," protested Doctor Jemmy. "As if men ever could!" replied the young lady.

However, the sweetest slice of sugar-cane must have empty pores too soon, and the last drop of honey drains out of the comb, and the silver voice of the flute expires, and the petals of the fairest rose must flag. All these ideas (which have been repeated, or repeated them-

selves, for some thousands of years) were present for the first time in all existence—according to his conviction—in the mind of an exalted, yet depressed, young farmer, one fine Monday morning. Miss Fox had received her very last despatch, to the tune of "Roast beef," that morning, and sad to say she had not cut the string, though her pretty fingers flirted with it.

"My dear," said Mrs. Gilham, longing much to see within, inasmuch as she still had a tender heart for dainty tint, and true elegance of tone; "if you wish to save the string—fine whipcord every inch of it—Frank has a picker in the six-bladed knife his Godfather Farrant gave him, that will undo any knot that was ever tied by Samson." Upon him, she meant perhaps; however the result is quite the same.

"No, thank you," answered Christie, with a melancholy glance; "it had better be put in my trunk, as it is. What induced them to send it, when I'm just going away?"

"Going away! Next week, my dear, you may begin to think about it."

"To-morrow, I must go. I am as well as ever. Better a great deal, I ought to say. What did Dr. Gronow say on Saturday? And

I came down here, not to enjoy myself, but to keep up the spirits of my poor dear brother."

"Why his spirits are fine, Miss Fox. I only wish my poor dear Frank had a quarter of them. Last night I am sure—and a Sunday too, when you and my son were gone to church——"

"To the little church close by, you mean, with Mrs. Coombes and Mary; because the sermon in the morning had felt so—so edifying."

"Yes to be sure. But when your brother came in, and was surprised not to find you with us, you know; his conversation—oh dear, oh dear, rather worldly-minded I must confess, bearing in mind what day it was—but he and Rose they kept it up together, for the tip of her tongue is fit for anybody's ear-ring, as the ancient saying goes,—laughing, Miss Fox, and carrying on, till, although I was rather put out about it, and would have stopped any one but a visitor, I was absolutely compelled, I assure you, to pull out my pocket-handkerchief. Oh, I don't think there need be much fear about Doctor Jemmy's spirits!"

"But don't you think, Mrs. Gillham, it is chiefly his pride that supports him? We do the same sort of thing sometimes. We go into

the opposite extreme, and talk and laugh, as if we were in the highest spirits,—when we—when we don't want to let somebody know that we care what he thinks."

"Oh you have learned that, have you, my dear?" The old lady looked at her, with some surprise. "Well, well! Happy will be the man that you do it for."

Christie felt that she was blushing, and yet could not help giving one sharp glance at her simple hostess. And it would have gone hard with Frank Gilham's chances, if the maiden had spied any special meaning in the eyes of his dear mother. But the elderly lady gazed benignant, reflecting softly upon the time, when she had been put to those disguises of the early maidenhood; which are but the face, with its first bloom upon it. For the plain truth was, that she did not wish her son to fall in love, for some ten years yet, at the age that had suited his father. And as for Miss Fox, half a glimpse at her parcels would show her entire unfitness.

"I shall never do it for any man," said Christie, in scorn of her own suggestion; "if I am anything, I am straightforward. And if ever I care for any man, I shall give him my hand, and tell him so. Not, of course, till I

know that he is gone upon me. But now I want to do a crafty thing. And money can do almost anything—except in love, Mrs. Gilham. I would not do it without your knowledge; for that would be a very mean return for all your kindness to me. I have made up my mind to see Lady Waldron, and tell her just what I think of her."

"My dear, Lady Waldron is nothing to me. The Gilhams have held their own land, from the time of cross-bows and battle-axes. Besides our own, we rent about fifty acres of the outside of the Waldron property. But if they can get more for it, let them do so. Everybody loved poor Sir Thomas; and it was a pleasure to have to deal with him. But there is no such feeling about her ladyship; noble enough to look at, but best to deal with at a distance."

"Well, I mean to see her at close quarters. She has behaved shamefully to my brother. And who is she to frighten me? She is at the bottom of all these wicked, wretched falsehoods, that go about. And she would not even see him, to let him speak up for truth and justice. I call that mean, and low, and nasty. Of course the subject is horrible to her; and perhaps,—well, perhaps I should have done the

same. But for all that, I mean to see her; for I love fair play; and this is foul play."

"What a spirit you have, my dear! I should never have thought it was in your gentle face. But you are in the right. And if I can help you—that is, if you are equal to it——"

"I am more than equal to it, my dear friend. What is there to fear, with the truth against black falsehoods?"

Mrs. Gilham turned her wedding-ring upon her "marriage-finger"—a thing she never failed to do, when her heart was busy with the bygone days. Then she looked earnestly at her guest, and saw that the point to be considered was—not shall we attempt it, but how shall it be done?

"Your mind is entirely set upon it. And therefore we will do our best;" she promised. "But it cannot be managed in a moment. Will you allow me to consult my son? It seems like attacking a house almost. But I suppose it is fair, in a case like this."

"Perfectly fair. Indoors it must be, as there is no other chance. A thief must be caught inside a house, when he will not come out of it. And a person is no better than a thief, who locks her doors against justice."

When Frank was consulted, he was much against the scheme; but his opposition was met more briefly than his mother's had been.

"Done it shall be; and if you will not help, it shall be done without you"—was the attitude taken, not quite in words; but so that there was no mistaking it. Then he changed sides suddenly, confuted his own reasoning, and entered into the plan quite warmly; especially when it was conceded that he might be near the house, if he thought proper, in case of anything too violent, or carried beyond what English ladies could be expected to endure. For as all agreed, there was hardly any saying what an arrogant foreigner might not attempt.

"I am quite aware that it will cost a large amount of bribery," said Christie, with a smile which proved her faith in her own powers in that line; "will ten pounds do it, Mr. Frank, should you suppose?"

Though far gone in that brilliant and gloomy, nadir and zenith, tropical and arctic, condition of the human mind, called love, Frank Gilham was of English nature; which, though torn up by the roots, ceases not to stick fast to the main chance. And so much the nobler on his part was this, because the money was not his, nor ever likely so to be.

"I think that three pounds ought to do it, or even fifty shillings," he replied, with an estimate perhaps too low of the worth of the British domestic. "If we could choose a day when old Binstock is off duty, it would save the biggest tip of all. And it would not matter what he thought afterwards, though doubtless he would be in a fury."

"Oh, I won't do it. I don't think I can do it. It does seem so nasty, and underhanded."

Coming now to the practical part, Miss Fox was suddenly struck with the objections.

"My dear, I am very glad that you have come to see it in such a proper light;" cried Mrs. Gilham a little prematurely, while her son nodded very sagely, ready to say "Amen" to either side, according to the final jump of the vacillating reasoner.

"No, but I won't then. I won't see it so. When people behave most improperly to you, are you bound to stand upon propriety with them? Just answer me that, if you can, Mrs. Gilham. My mind is quite settled by that consideration. I'll go in for it wholesale, Binstock and all, if he means a five-pound note for every stripe in his waistcoat."

"Mr. Binstock is much too grand to wear a striped waistcoat;" said Frank with the gravity

of one who understands his subject. "But he goes to see his parents, every Wednesday. And he will not be wronged in reality, for it will be worth all that to him, for the rise he will get by his absence."

"Binstock's parents! Why he must be over sixty!" exclaimed Frank's mother in amazement. She had greatly undervalued her son's knowledge.

"They are both in the poorhouse at Pumpington, the father eighty-five and the mother eighty-two. They married too early in life," said Frank, "and each of their fifteen children leaves the duty of supporting them to the other fourteen. Our Binstock is the most filial of the whole, for he takes his parents two ounces of tobacco, every Wednesday."

"The inhuman old miser!" cried Miss Fox. "He shall never have two pence out of me. That settles it. Mr. Frank, try for Wednesday."

"Well, Frank, you puzzle me altogether;" said Mrs. Gilham with some annoyance. "To think of your knowing all those things, and never telling your own mother!"

"I never talk of my neighbours' affairs, until they become my own business." Frank pulled up his collars, and Christie said to herself that his mind was very large. "But don't run

away with the idea, mother, that I ever pry into such small matters. I know them by the merest accident. You know that the game-keeper offers me a day or two when the woodcocks come in; and Batts detests old Binstock. But he is on the very best terms with Charles, and Bob, and Tamar Haddon. Through them I can manage it perhaps for Wednesday, if Miss Fox thinks fit to entrust me with the matter."

It happened that Lady Waldron held an important council with Mr. Webber, on the following Wednesday. She had long begun to feel the helplessness, and sad disadvantages of her position, as a foreigner who had never even tried to understand the Country in which she lived, or to make friends of any of the people round her. And this left her so much the more at the mercy of that dawdling old solicitor.

"Oh that I could only find my dear brother!" was the constant cry of her sorrow, and her wrath. "I wonder that he does not rush to help me. He would have done so long ago, if he had only known of this."

"No reply, no reply yet?" she asked, after listening, with patience that surprised herself, to the lawyer's long details of nothing, and

excellent reasons for doing still less. "Are you certain that you have had my demand, my challenge, my supplication to my only brother entered in all the Spanish journals, the titles of which I supplied to you? And entered in places conspicuous?"

"In every one of them, madam, with instructions that all replies should be sent to the office of the paper, and then direct to you. Therefore you would receive them, and not our firm. Shall we try in any other country?"

"Yes, oh yes! That is very good indeed. I was thinking of that only yesterday. My brother has much love for Paris sometimes, whenever he is in good—in affluence, as your expression is. For I have not concealed from you, Mr. Webber, that although of the very first families of Spain, the Count is not always—through caprice of fortune, his resources are disposed to rise and fall. You should therefore try Paris, and Lyons, and Marseilles. It is not in my power to present the names of the principal journals. But they can be discovered, even in this country."

Mr. Webber was often hard put to it, by the lady's calm assumption, that barbarism is the leading characteristic of an Englishman.

For Theodore Webber was no time-server; only bound by his duty to the firm, and his sense of loyal service to a client of lofty memory. And he knew that he could take the lead of any English lady, because of her knowledge of his character, and the way in which he pronounced it. But with this Spanish lady, all his really solid manner, and true English style were thrown away.

"Even in this country, madam, we know the names of the less enlightened Journals of the Continent. They are hard to read, because of the miserable paper they are printed on; but my younger son has the gift of languages, and nothing is too outlandish for him. That also shall be attended to. And now about this question that arises between yourself and Mr. Penniloe?"

"I will not yield. I will sign nothing. Everything shall be as my husband did intend. And who can declare what that was, a stranger, or his own wife, with the most convincing?"

"Yes, madam, that is true enough. But according to English law, we are bound by the words of the will; and unless those are doubtful, no evidence of intention is admissible, and even then——"

"I will not be bound by a—by an adaptation

of words that was never intended. What has a heretic minister to do with my family, and with Walderscourt?"

"But, madam, excuse me. Sir Thomas Waldron asked you, and you consented, to the appointment of the Rev. Philip Penniloe, as your co-executor, and co-trustee for your daughter, Miss Inez."

"If I did, it was only to please my husband, because he was in pain so severe. It should have been my brother, or else my son. I have said to you before, that after all that has been done, I refuse to adhere to that interpretation."

The solicitor fixed his eyes on her, not in anger, but in pure astonishment. He had deep grey eyes in a rugged setting, with large wrinkles under, and dark gabled brows above; and he had never met a lady yet—except his own wife—who was not overpowered by their solemn wisdom. Lady Waldron was not overpowered by them. In her ignorance of English usage, she regarded this gentleman of influence and trust, as no more than a higher form of Binstock.

"I shall have to throw it up," said Mr. Webber to himself; "but oh, what gorgeous picking, for that very low-principled Bubb and Cockshalt!" The eminent firm he thought of

thus were always prepared to take anything he missed.

"Your ladyship is well aware," he said, being moved by that last reflection, "that we cannot have anything perfect in this world, but must take things as we find them. Mr. Penniloe is a most reasonable man, and acknowledges the value of my experience. He will not act in any way against your wishes, so far as may be in conformity with sound legal practice. That is the great point for us to consider, laying aside all early impressions—which are generally loose when examined—of—of Continental codes, and so on. We need not anticipate any trouble from your co-executor, who as a clergyman is to us a layman, if proper confidence is reposed in us. Already we are taking the regular steps to obtain Probate of a very simple will, prepared very carefully in our Office, and by exceedingly skilful hands. We act for Mr. Penniloe, as well as for your ladyship. All is proceeding very smoothly, and exactly as your dear husband would have wished."

"Then he would have wished to have his last rest dishonoured, and his daughter estranged from her own mother."

"The young lady will probably come round, madam, as soon as you encourage her. Your

mind is the stronger of the two, in every way. With regard to that sad and shameful outrage, we are doing everything that can be done. We have very little doubt that if matters are left to our judgment, and discreet activity——"

"Activity, sir! And what have you done? How long is it—a month? I cannot reckon time, because day and night are the same thing to me. Will you never detect that abominable crime? Will you never destroy those black miscreants? Will you never restore—oh, I cannot speak of it—and all the time you know who did it all! There is no word strong enough in your poor tongue, for such an outcast monster. Yet he goes about, he attends to his business, they shake him by the hand, they smile at him; instead of spit, they smile at him! And this is called a Christian land! My God, what made You make it?"

"I implore your ladyship not to be excited. Hitherto you have shown such self-command. Day and night, we are on the watch, and something must speedily come of it. We have three modes of action, each one of them sure to be successful, with patience. But the point is this—to have no mistake about it, to catch him with evidence sufficient to convict him, and then to punish and disgrace him for ever."

"But how much longer before you will begin? I am so tired, so weary, so worn out—can you not see how it is destroying me?"

Mr. Webber looked at her, and could not deny that this was a very different Lady Waldron from the one who had scarcely deigned to bow to him, only a few months ago. The rich warm colour had left her cheeks, the large dark eyes were wan and sunken, weariness and dejection spread, where pride and strength of will had reigned. The lawyer replied in a bolder tone than he would have employed, last summer.

"Lady Waldron, we can do no more. If we attempted any stronger measures, the only result would be to destroy our chance. If you think that any other firm, or any kind of agency, would conduct matters more to your satisfaction, and more effectually than we have done, we would only ask you to place it in their hands. I assure you, madam, that the business is not to our liking, or even to our benefit. For none but an old and most valued client, would we have undertaken it. If you think proper, we will withdraw, and hand over all information very gladly to our successors."

"To whom can I go? Who will come to my rescue in this wicked, impious, accursed land? If my brother were here, is it possible to doubt

what he would do—how he would proceed? He would tear that young man, arm from arm, and leg from leg, and lay him in the market-place, and shoot any one who came to bury him. Listen, Mr. Webber, I live only for one thing – to find my noble brother, and to see him do that."

The lady stood up, with her eyebrows knitted, her dark eyes glowing, and her white hands thrown apart and quivering, evidently tearing an imaginary Jemmy.

"Let us hope for the best, madam, hope for the best, and pray for the blessing of the Almighty, upon our weak endeavours."

This was anything but a kind view to take of the dispersion of poor Jemmy; but the lawyer was terrified for the moment by the lady's vehemence. That she who had hitherto always shown such self-command and dignity—he began to fear that there was too much truth in her account of the effect upon her.

Suddenly, as if all her passion had been feigned—though none who had seen, or even heard her, could believe that possible—she returned to her tranquil, self-possessed, and even cold and distant style. The fire in her eyes, and the fury of her gestures sank and were gone, as if by magic; and the voice became

soft and musical, as the sound of a bell across a summer sea.

"You will pardon me," she said, as she fell back into the chair, from which in her passion she had risen; "but sometimes my trouble is more great than I can bear. Ladies of this country are so delicate and gentle, they cannot have much hatred, because they have no love. And yet they can have insolence, very strong, and very wonderful. Yesterday, or two days ago, I obtained good proof of that. The sister of that man is here—the man who has overwhelmed me thus—and she has written a letter to me, very quiet, very simple, very polite, requesting me to appoint an interview for her in my own house;"—this had been done on Monday, at the suggestion of Frank Gilham, that fair means should be exhausted first—"but after writing thus, she has the insulting to put in under—something like this, I remember very well—'if you refuse to see me, I shall be compelled to come, without permission.' Reflect upon that, Mr. Webber."

"Madam, it was not the proper thing to say. But ladies are, even when very young, a little —perhaps a little inclined to do, what they are inclined to."

"I sent her letter back, without a word, by

the insolent person who brought it. Just in the same manner as her wicked brother's card. It is quite certain, that she will never dare to enter into my presence."

"You have made a mistake there, Lady Waldron. Here I am, to thank you for your good manners; and to speak a few truths, which you cannot answer."

Christie Fox walked up the room, with her eyes fixed steadfastly upon the other's, made a very graceful curtsey, and stood, without even a ribbon trembling. She was beautifully dressed, in dove-coloured silk, and looked like a dove, that has never been fluttered. All this Lady Waldron perceived at a glance; and knew that she had met her equal, in a brave young Englishwoman.

Mr. Webber, who longed to be far away, jumped about with some agility, and manœuvred not to turn his back upon either of the ladies, while he fetched a chair for the visitor. But his trouble was lost, for the younger lady declined with a wave of her hand; while the elder said—"Sir, I will thank you to ring the bell."

"That also is vain," said Miss Fox, calmly. "I will not leave this room, Lady Waldron, until I have told you my opinion of your con-

duct. The only question is—do you wish to hear it, in the presence of this gentleman; or do you wish me to wait until he is gone?"

To all appearances, the lawyer was by far the most nervous of the three; and he made off for the door, but received a sign to stop.

"It is just as well, perhaps, that you should not be alone," Christie began in a clear firm voice, with her bright eyes flashing, so that the dark Spanish orbs were but as dead coals in comparison, "and that you should not be ashamed; because it proves at least that you are honest in your lunatic conclusions. I am not speaking rudely. The greatest kindness that any one can do you, is to believe that you are mad."

So great was the force of her quiet conviction that Lady Waldron raised one hand, and laid it upon her throbbing temples. For weeks she had been sleepless, and low, and feverish, dwelling on her wrongs in solitude, and estranged from her own daughter.

"Hush, hush, my good young lady!" pleaded the old Solicitor; but his client gazed heavily at her accuser, as if she could scarcely apprehend; and Christie thought that she did not care.

"You have done a most wicked thing;" Miss Fox continued in a lower tone, "as bad,

in its way as the great wrong done to you. You have condemned an innocent man, ruined his life to the utmost of your power, and refused to let him even speak for himself. Is that what you call justice?"

"He was not innocent. He was the base miscreant. We have the proof of the man who saw him."

Lady Waldron spoke slowly, in a strange dull tone, while her lips scarcely moved, and her hands fell on her lap.

"There is no such proof. The man owns his mistake. My brother can prove that he was miles away. He was called to his father's sick bed, that very night. And before daylight he was far upon the road. He never returned till days afterwards. Then he finds this black falsehood; and you for its author!"

"Is there any truth in this?"

Lady Waldron turned slightly towards Mr. Webber, as if she were glad to remove her eyes from her visitor's contemptuous and overpowering gaze.

"There may be some, madam. I believe it is true that the blacksmith has changed his opinion, and that Dr. Fox was called suddenly away."

The old Solicitor was beginning to feel uneasy

about his own share in the matter. He had watched Miss Fox intently through his glasses; and long experience in law-courts told him, that she thoroughly believed every word she uttered. He was glad that he had been so slow and careful; and resolved to be more so, if possible, henceforth.

"And now if you are not convinced of the great wrong you have done," said Christie coming nearer, and speaking with a soft thrill in her voice, for tears were not far distant; "what have you to say to this? My brother, long before your husband's death, even before the last illness, had given his heart to your daughter Inez. Her father more than suspected that, and was glad to think it likely. Inez also knew it well. All this also I can prove, even to your satisfaction. Is it possible, even if he were a villain, and my brother is a gentleman of as good a family as your own, Lady Waldron —ask yourself, would he offer this dastard outrage to the father of the girl he loved? If you can believe it, you are not a woman. And that would be better for all other women. Oh, it is too cruel, too atrocious, too inhuman! And you are the one who has done it all. Lay this to heart—and that you may think of it, I will leave you to yourself."

Brave as she was, she could not quite accomplish this. It is a provision of Nature, that her highest production should be above the rules of inferior reason. When this fair young woman ceased to speak, and having discharged her mission should have walked away in silence —strange to say, she could do nothing of the kind. As if words had been her spring and motive power, no sooner were they exhausted than she herself broke down entirely. She fell away upon the rejected chair, covered her face with both hands, reckless of new kid gloves just come from Paris, and burst into a storm of tears and sobs.

"You have done it now," cried Mr. Webber; "I thought you would; but you wouldn't be stopped." He began to rush about helplessly, not on account of the poor girl's plight—for he had wife and daughter of his own, and knew that tears are never fatal, but often highly beneficial; "you have done it now; I thought you would." His prophetic powers seemed to console him.

Christie looked up through her dabbled gloves, and saw a sight that frightened her. Lady Waldron had been sitting at a large oak table covered with books and papers,—for the room was chiefly used for business, and not a

lady's bower—and there she sat still; but with this change, that she had been living, and now was dead. Dead to all perception of the life and stir around her, dead to all sense of right or wrong, of daylight or of darkness; but living still to the slow sad work that goes on in the body, when the mind is gone. Her head lay back on the stout oak rail; her comely face showed no more life than granite has, or marble; and her widow's hood dropped off, and shed the coils of her long black hair around.

"I can't make it out;" cried Mr. Webber, hurrying to the bell-rope, which he pulled to such purpose that the staple of the crank fell from the ceiling, and knocked him on the head. But Christie, recovering at a glance, ran round the end of the table, and with all her strength supported the tottering figure.

What she did afterwards, she never knew, except from the accounts of others; for she was too young to have presence of mind, when every one else was distracted. But from all that they said—and they were all against her—she must have shown readiness, and strength, and judgment, and taken Mr. Webber under her command.

One thing she remembered, because it was so bitter, and so frightfully unjust; and if

there was anything she valued -next to love and truth and honour, most of which are parts of it—Christie valued simple justice, and impartiality. To wit—as Mr. Webber might have put it—when she ran out to find Mr. Gilham, who had been left there, only because he did not choose to go away, and she only went to find him that he might run for Dr. Gronow—there was her brother standing with him, and words less friendly than usual were, as it seemed to her, passing between them.

"No time for this sort of thing now," she said, as well as her flurried condition would permit; and then she pulled her brother in, and sent Frank, who was wonderfully calm and reasonable, to fetch that other doctor too. Her brother was not in a nice frame of mind, according to her recollection; and there was no time to reason with him, if he chose to be so stupid. Therefore she sent him where he was wanted; and of course no doctor could refuse to go, under such frightful circumstances. But as for herself, she felt as if it mattered very little what she did; and so she went and sat somewhere in the dark, without even a dog for company, and finished, with many pathetic addenda, the good cry that had been broken off.

CHAPTER V.

A MAGIC LETTER.

"Oh, here you are at last then, are you?" said somebody entering the room with a light, by the time the young lady had wept herself dry, and was beginning to feel hungry; "what made you come here? I thought you were gone. To me it is a surprising thing, that you have the assurance to stay in this house."

"Oh, Jemmy, how can you be so cruel, when every bit of it was for you?"

"For me indeed! I am very much obliged. For your own temper, I should say. Old Webber says that if she dies, there may be a verdict of manslaughter."

"I don't care two pins, if there is; when all the world is so unjust to me. But how is she, Jemmy? What has happened to her? What on earth is it all about?"

"Well, I think you ought to know that best. Webber says he never heard any one like you, in all his experience of Criminal Courts."

"Much I care what he says — the old dodderer! You should have seen him hopping about the room, like a frog with the rheumatism. You should have seen him stare, when the bell-rope fell. When I said the poor thing's hands were cold, he ran and poked the fire with his spectacles. But can't you tell me how she is? Surely I have a right to know, if I am to be manslaughtered."

"Well," replied Dr. Fox, with that heavy professional nod which he ridiculed in others; "she is in a very peculiar state. No one can tell what may come of it."

"Not a fit, Jemmy? Not like dear father's; not a mild form of—no, it seemed quite different."

"It is a different thing altogether, though proceeding probably from the brain. An attack of what we call catalepsy. Not at all a common thing, and quite out of my own experience, though I know of it from the books a little. Gronow knew it, of course, at a glance. Fortunately I had sense enough not to try any strong measures till he came. Any other young fellow in this part of the world would have tried venesection instantly, and it might have killed her. My treatment happened to be quite right, from my acquaintance with principles. It is nothing less than a case of

entirely suspended animation. How long it may last, none can foretell."

"But you don't think, it will kill her, Jemmy? Why my animation was suspended ever so long, the other day——"

"That was quite a different thing—this proceeds from internal action, overpowering emotion in a very anæmic condition; yours was simply external concussion, operating on a rather highly charged——"

"You are very polite. My own fault in fact. Who gave me the horse to drive about? But surely if a disordered brain like mine contrives to get right again——"

"Christie, I wish to do you good. You have brought me into a frightful mess, because you are so headlong. But you meant it for the best, I know; and I must not be too hard upon you."

"What else have you been for the last five minutes? Oh, Jemmy, Jemmy, I am so sorry! Give me a kiss, and I will forgive you."

"You are a very quick, warmhearted girl; and such have never too much reason."

The Doctor kissed his sister, in a most magnanimous manner; and she believed implicitly (until the next time of argument) that she had done the injury, and her brother sweetly borne it.

"Now come, while it is hot," said he; "get your courage up, and come. Never let a wound grow cold. Between you two there must be no ill-will; and she is so noble."

"Oh, indeed! Who is it then? It is so good, and so elevating, to be brought into contact with those wonderfully lofty people."

"It is exactly what you want. If you can only obtain her friendship, it will be the making of your character."

"For goodness' sake, don't lose a moment. I feel myself already growing better, nobler, loftier."

"There is nothing in you grave, and stable, none of the stronger elements;" said the Doctor, as he led the way along an empty passage.

"Don't you be too sure of that;" his sister answered, in a tone which he remembered afterwards.

Lady Waldron lay on a broad and solid sofa, well-prepared for her; and there was no sign left of life or movement in her helpless figure. She was not at all like "recumbent marble"—which is the ghost of death itself—neither was she stiff or straight; but simply still, and in such a condition, that however any part of her frame might be placed, so it would remain; submissive only to the laws of gravitation, and

to no exercise of will, if will were yet surviving. The face was as pale as death, the eyes half open but without expression; the breathing scarcely perceptible, and the pulse like the flutter of eider down, or gossamer in a sheltered spot.

There was nothing ghastly, repulsive, or even greatly distressing at first sight; for the fine, and almost perfect, face had recovered in placid abandonment the beauty impaired by grief and passion. And yet the dim uncertainty, the hovering between life and death, the touching frailty of human power over-tried and vanquished, might move the bitterest foe to tears, and waken the compassion planted in all human hearts by heaven.

Christie was no bitter foe, but a kind impulsive generous maiden, rushing at all hazards to defend the right, ready to bite the dust when in the wrong, if properly convinced of it. Jemmy stepped back, and spread forth his hand more dramatically than was needed, as much as to say—"See what you have done! Never forget this, while you live. I leave you to self-abasement."

The sensitive and impetuous girl required no such admonishment. She fell on her knees, and took one cold hand, while her face turned

as pale as the one she watched. The pity of the sight became more vivid, deep, and overpowering; and she whispered her little bedside prayer, for that was the only one she recalled. Then she followed it up with confession.

"I know what ought to be done to me. I ought to be taken by the neck —no, that's not right—I ought to be taken to the place of execution, and there hanged by the neck, till I am dead, dead, dead."

All this she may have deserved, but what she got was very different.

Around her bended neck was flung no hangman's noose, but a gentle arm, the softest and loveliest ever felt, while dark eyes glistened into her own, and seeming to be encouraged there, came closer through a clustering bower; and in less time than it takes to tell, two fair young faces touched each other, and two quick but heavy hearts were throbbing very close together.

"It is more my fault than yours," said Nicie, leading the way to another room, when a few soft words of comfort and good-will had passed; "I am the one who has done all this; and Dr. Gronow says so—or at least he would, if he said what he thinks. It was the low condition caused by long and lonely thinking, and the

want of sufficient food and air, and the sense of having no one, not even me."

"But that was her fault. She discouraged you; she showed no affection for you; she was even very angry with you; because you dared to think differently, because you had noble faith and trust."

"For that I deserve no credit, because I could not help it. But I might have been kinder to her, Christie; I might have shown less pride and temper. I might have said to myself more often—'she is sadly shattered; and she is my mother.' It will teach me how to behave another time. For if she does not get well, and forgive me, I shall never forgive myself. I must have forgotten how much easier it is, to be too hard, than to be too soft."

"Probably you never thought about it;" said Christie, who knew a great deal about what were then called "the mental processes" —now gone into much bigger names, but the same nut in a harder shell. "You acted according to your sense of right; and that meant what you felt was right; and that came round to mean—Jemmy."

Nicie, who never examined her mind—perhaps the best thing to be done with it—was not

quite satisfied with this abruptly concrete view of the issue. "Perhaps, I did," she said and sighed; because everything felt so cloudy.

"Whatever you did—you are a darling;" said the more experienced one. "There is a lot of trouble before us both. Never mind, if we only stick together. Poor Jemmy believes that he is a wonder. Between us, we will fetch him down."

Nicie could perceive no call for that, being as yet of less practical turn. She was of that admirable, and too rare, and yearly diminishing, type of women, who see and feel that Heaven meant them, not to contend with, and outdo, but to comfort, purify, and ennoble that stronger, coarser, and harder half, called men.

"I think that he wants fetching up," she said, with very graceful timidity; "but his sister must know best, of course. Is it right to talk of such things now?"

"Decidedly not;" Miss Fox replied. "In fact it is downright wicked. But somehow or other, I always go astray. Whenever I am out of sorts with myself, I take a turn at other people. But how many turns must I have at others, before I get my balance now! Did you ever see anything so sad? But how very beautiful she is! I never noticed it, this after-

noon, because I was in such a rage, I suppose. How long is she likely to remain like this?"

"Dr. Gronow cannot say. He has known one case which lasted for a month. But then there was no consciousness at all. He thinks that there is a little now. But we can perceive no sign of it."

"Well, I think I did. I am almost sure I did;" Christie answered eagerly; "when I said 'dead, dead, dead,' in that judicial manner, there came a little gleam of light into her eyes, as if she approved of the sentence. And again when you called me your sister, there seemed to be a sparkle of astonishment, as if she thought you were in too much of a hurry; and perhaps you were, my darling. Oh what a good judge Jemmy is! No wonder he is getting so conceited."

"If there is any consciousness at all"—said Nicie, avoiding that other subject; "this trance (if that is the English word for it) will not last long—at least Dr. Gronow says so; and Doctor Jemmy—what a name for a gentleman of science!—thoroughly confirms it. But Dr. Fox is so diffident and modest, that he seems to wait for his friend's opinion; though he must know more, being younger."

"Certainly he ought," Miss Fox replied, with a twinkle of dubious import; "I hear a great deal of such things. No medical man is ever at his prime, unless it is at thirty-nine years and a half. Under forty, he can have no experience, according to the general public; and over forty he is on the shelf, according to his own Profession. For that one year, they ought to treble all their fees."

"That would only be fair; for they always charge too little."

"You are an innocent duck;" said Christie. "There is a spot on your cheek that I must kiss; because it always comes, when you hear the name of Jemmy. Abstract affection for unknown science. Oh do have a try at Dr. Gronow. He knows fifty times as much as poor Jemmy."

"But he doesn't know how to please me," replied Nicie; "and I suppose that ought to count for something; after all. I must go and tell him what you thought you saw. That is his step in the passage now; and he ordered us to watch for any symptoms of that sort. Oh what will he think of me, for leaving Nurse alone? Good night, dear Christie; I shall come away no more. But Binstock, our great man, is come back. He will attend to

you, and see that you don't go home starving, or by yourself."

"Positive statements suit young men," Dr. Gronow declared, as he buttoned up his coat, about an hour afterwards; "and so does sitting up all night. Fox, you had better act up to that. But I shall just see your sister safe, as far as the hospitable White Post, and then I shall go home to my supper. There is not the slightest danger now, but constant attention is needful, in case of sudden revival. That I do not at all expect; but you know what to do, if it happens. The third day will be the most likely time; and then any pleasing excitement, or attraction—but I shall be here, and see to that."

"Oh Dr. Gronow," exclaimed Miss Fox, as she fastened her cloak to go with him; "how I wish I had been born a little sooner, to see you more positive than you are now!"

"Miss Fox, it is a happy thing for me, that I anticipated all such views. Young ladies, I meant of course—and not young men. Yet alas, the young ladies are too negative."

On the third day from Lady Waldron's seizure, the postman of the name of Walker, finding not even a mushroom left to retard

the mail-delivery, and having a cold north wind at his back, brought to the house, soon after noon, a very large letter, marked "Ship Despatch. Two shillings and tenpence to pay," and addressed to Lady Waldron.

"It must be from dear Tom," pronounced Nicie; "we have not heard from him since he sailed for India. There is no other person in the world, capable of such a frightful scrawl."

"Why, this is the very thing we want," said Gronow, who was present according to promise; "large, conspicuous, self-assertive. Let somebody fetch me a green flower-stick."

Slitting one end of the stick, he inserted the lower edge of the letter, and fixed it upright in the scroll-work at the bottom of the couch. Then he drew the curtain back, and a slant of cheerful sunshine broke upon the thick bold writing. But the figure on the couch lay still, without a sign of interest, cold, rigid, and insensible.

"I'll keep out of sight," the Doctor whispered, "and let no one say a word. But presently when I hold my hand up, let Miss Nicie strike a few notes, not too rapidly, on her guitar—some well-known Spanish melody."

Gliding round the back of the couch, with a very gentle touch he raised the unconscious

lady's head, and propped it with a large firm pillow; so that the dim half-open eyes were level with and set point-blank upon the shining letter. Securing it so, he withdrew a little, and held up his hand to Nicie.

She, upon a low chair further off, touched the strings of her mother's own and in younger days much loved guitar; gently at first, like a distant ripple; then with a strong bold swell arising into a grand melodious strain—the March of Andalusia. All present held their breath to watch, and saw a strange and moving sight.

The Spanish lady's eyes began to fill with soft and quivering light, like a lake when the moon is rising; the fringe of their dark lashes rose; a little smile played on her lips, and touched them with a living tint; then all the brilliance of her gaze flashed forth, and fastened on that letter. She lifted both her trembling hands, and the letter was put into them. Her face was lit with vivid joy, and her lips pronounced—"My son, my son!" Then wanting nothing more, she drew the precious token to her breast, concealed it there, and sank into profound, and tranquil, and sweet sleep.

"She will be all right, when she awakes, and then she will want a lot of food;" said

Dr. Gronow with a quiet grin, while Nicie and Chris wept tears of joy, and Dr. Fox and the Nurse looked queer. "Mind she can't live on her son's letter. Beef-tea, arrowroot, and port-wine, leg of mutton gravy, and neat's foot jelly — finer than the sweetest sweetheart's letters, let alone a boy who writes with the stump of a cigar. Ladies and gentlemen, my job is over; what a blessing Penniloe is gone to London! We should have had a prayer-meeting every day. Miss Fox, I think I shall call you 'Christie,' because you are so un-christian."

"You may call me anything you like—that is so long as it is something you do like. I shall almost begin to have faith in doctors now, in spite of poor Jemmy being one."

"Jemmy, you had better throw up the trade. Your sister understands it best. The hardest work, and the hardest paid —however I go a trout-fishing, ere ever the river freezes."

The wind was very cold, and everybody there shivered at the shudders he would have to undergo, as they saw him set forth with an eager step. He waved his hand back from a turn of the walk which reminded him of the river, and his shoulders went up, as if he had a trout on hook.

"He is happy. Let him be," said the percipient Christie; "he won't catch anything in fact; but the miraculous draught in fancy."

"He ought to be pitched in," replied her brother, who was put out about something, possibly the fingering of the second fiddle; "the least that can be done to him is to pitch him in, for trying to catch trout in December. Pike had vowed to do it; but those fellows are gone home, Hopper and all, just when the world was most in want of them. Christie, you will just come back with me, to the Old Barn."

"Why does Dr. Gronow address nearly all his very excellent remarks to me? And why does he always look at me, when he speaks?"

"Because you are so pretty, dear. And because you catch his meaning first. They like that sort of thing;" said Nicie.

"For looks I am nowhere, with Nicie present. But he sees advanced intelligence in me. And he comes from where they appreciate it. I shall go back to Old Barn, just when I think right."

"We are coming to something!" cried Doctor Jemmy, who looked pleasantly, but loftily, at all the female race—save Nicie, who was saved perhaps, till two months after

marriage—"stay, if you like, where you are appreciated, so highly, so very highly."

Christie's face became red as a rose, for really this was too bad on his part, and after all she had done for him, as witnessed those present.

"They like me," she said in an off-handed manner; "and I like them—which is more than one can do to everybody. But it makes very little difference, I am afraid, for I shall never see them any more, unless they come to Foxden. I had made up my mind to go home, the moment Lady Waldron was out of danger. I did not come here to please myself; and this is all I get for it. Good-bye to fair Perlycross to-morrow! One must not neglect one's dear father and mother, even for—even for such a dear as Nicie."

"Well, I never knew what it was to be out of temper." There was some truth in this assertion, though it seems a large one; for Jemmy Fox had a remarkably sweet temper; and a man who takes stock of himself, when short of that article, has already almost replaced it. "But how will you go, my dear little Cayenne pepper? Will you pack up all your grandeur, and have a coach and four?"

"Yes that I will," answered Christie quick as light, "though it won't cost me quite as

much as the one I hired, when I came post-haste to your rescue. The name of my coach is the *Defiance;* and the Guard shall play 'Roast-beef' all the way, in honour of the coming Christmas-time. Won't we have a fine time at Foxden, if father is in good health again?"

Jemmy wisely left her to her own devices—for she generally "took the change out of him"—and consoled himself with soft contemplation of a lovelier, nicer, and (so far as he knew yet) ten thousand times sweeter-tempered girl, whose name was Nicie Waldron.

Now that sweet creature had a worry of her own, though she did not afflict the public with it. She was dying with anxiety, all the time, to know the contents of her brother Tom's letter, which had so enlivened her dear mother.

It is said that the only thing the all-wise Solomon could not explain to the Queen of Sheba, was the process of her own mind, or rather perhaps the leaps of it, which landed her in conclusions quite correct, yet unsupported even by the shadow of an enthymem. Miss Waldron was not so clever as the Queen of Sheba, or even as Miss Christie Fox; yet she had arrived at a firm conviction that the one, who was destined to solve the sad and torturing question about her dear father, was no

other than her brother, Tom Rodrigo. She had observed that his letter bore no token of the family bereavement, neither was that to be expected yet, although six weeks had now elapsed since the date of their sore distress.

Envelopes were not as yet in common use, and a letter was a cumbrous and clumsy-looking thing, one of the many reasons being that a writer was bound by economy, and very often by courtesy as well, to fill three great pages, before he began to double in. This naturally led to a vast sprawl of words, for the most part containing very little; and "what shall I say next?" was the constant enquiry of even the most loving correspondent. Nicie knew well, that her brother was not gifted with the pen of a ready writer, and that all his heart indited of was—"what shall I put, to get done with it?" This increased the value of his letters (by means of their rarity) and also their interest, according to the canon that plenty of range should be allowed for the reader's imagination.

But now even too much range was left, for that of the affectionate and poetic maiden, inasmuch as her mother lay asleep for hours with this fine communication to support her heart. There was nothing for Nicie to do, except to go to sleep patiently on her own account, and

that she did in her own white bed, and saw a fair vision through tears of joy.

Behold, she was standing at the door, the sacred portal of Walderscourt, gazing at trees that were full of singing birds, with her milk-white pony cropping clover honey-sweet, and *Pixie* teetotuming after his own tail. All the air was blossoming with dance of butterflies, and all the earth was laughing at the flatteries of the sun. And behold a very tall form arose, from beyond the weeping willow, leading a form yet taller, and looking back for fear of losing it. Then a loud voice shouted, and it was brother Tom's—"Here he is at last! No mistake about it. I have found the Governor —hurrah, hurrah!" The maiden sprang up with a bounding heart, to embrace her darling father. But alas, there was nothing, except the cold moon, and a pure virgin bosom that glistened with tears.

When Tom's letter came to the reading at last, there was plenty of blots in it, and brown sand, but not a blessed bit of poetry. The youth had been at Eton, and exhausted there all the tendency of his mind towards metre. Even now people, who ought to know better, ask why poetry will not go down with the tall, and imaginative, and romantic public. It must

be from the absence of the spark divine among them. Nay rather because ere they could spell, their flint was fixed for life, with the "fire" used up by Classic hammer.

Of these things the present Sir Thomas Rodrigo Waldron had neither thought nor heed. For him it was enough to be released; and the less he saw of book and pen, for the rest of his natural life, the better for the book, the pen, and him. So that on the whole he deserved much credit, and obtained even more (from his mother) as the author of the following fine piece of correspondence. Though all the best bits were adapted from a book, entitled "The young man's polite letter-writer, to his parents, sisters, sweethearts, friends, and the Minister of his native parish, etc., etc.—also when applying for increase of wages."

"Valetta, in the Island of Malta, Mediterranean Sea, etc. November the 5th, also Guy Fawkes' Day, A.D. 1835.

"My beloved and respected Mother,

"I take up my pen with mingled feelings of affection and regret. The bangs" —oh, he ought to say "pangs," thought Nicie, as her mother read it on most gravely—"which I have suffered, and am suffering still, arise from various sources. Affection, because of

your unceasing and unmerited parental goodness; regret, because absence in a foreign land enhances by a hundred-fold the value of all those lost endearments. I hope that you will think of me, whenever you sit on the old bench by the door, and behold the sun setting in the east."

"It is very beautiful," said Lady Waldron, animated by a cup of strong beef-tea; "but Rodrigo was so hard to kiss. Very often, I have knocked my head—but he is competent to feel it in his own head now."

"Mother, there is no bench by the door. And how can the sun set in the east? Oh I see it was 'west,' and he has scratched it out, because of his being in the east himself."

"That means the same thing;" replied Lady Waldron; "Inez, if you intend to find fault with your dear brother's letter about such trifles, you deserve to hear no more of it."

"Mother, as if it made any difference where the sun sets; so long as he can see it!"

"He always had large thoughts," reflected his mother; "he is not of this cold geography. Harken how beautifully he proceeds to write—

"'But it is vain to indulge these contemplations. Thanks to your careful tuition, and the lofty example set before me, I trust that I shall

never be found wanting in my duty to the Country that gave me birth. Unfortunately in these foreign parts, the price of every article is excessive; and although I am guided, as you are well aware, by the strictest principles of economy, my remembrance of what is due to you, and the position of a highly respected family, have in some degree necessitated an anticipation of resources. Feeling assured of your sympathy, and that it will assume a practical form by return of post, I venture to state for your guidance that the house of Plumper, Wiggins, and Golightly in this City have been advised, and have consented to receive on my behalf a remittance of £120, which will, I trust, appear a very reasonable sum.'"

"Mother, dear mother, let me go on," cried Nicie, as the letter dropped from her mother's hand; "the pleasure and excitement have been too much for you, although the style is so excellent."

"It is not the style; but my breath has been surprised, by —by the expressions of that last sentence. The sum that I myself placed to his credit, out of my bonds of the City of Corduba, was in addition, and without his father's knowledge—but no doubt he will give

explanation more further down; though the writing appears now to become of a different kind, shorter and less polished. But why is he in Malta, when the ship sailed for Bombay? Oh I am terrified there will be some war. The English can never stay without fighting very long. And behold his letter seems to go into three pieces! See now, it is quite crooked, Inez, and of less correction. Nevertheless I approve more of it so. Listen again, child.

"'I was almost forgeting to say that we were mett before we had got very far on our way by a Despatch Vessle bringing urgent orders for all of the Draught to be sent to this place, which is not half so hot as the other place would be, and much more convenient, and healthy but too white. But it does make the money fly, and they are a jolley sett. I have long been wanting to write home, but waited untill there was some news to tell, and we could tell where we are going next. But we shall have to stay here for some time, because most of our things were sent to West Indies, and the other part went on to East India. It will all be for the best because so strong a change of climate will be almost certain to destroy the moths. I have bought three dogs. There is a new sort here, very

clever, and can almost speak. I hope all the dogs at home are well. I miss the shooting very much, and there are no horses in the Mediterranean big enough to cary me. Now I must conclude with best love and duty to the Governor, and you, and Nicie, and old nurse Sweetland, and anybody else who inquires for

"'remaining your affectionate and dutiful Son,

"'TOM R. WALDRON.

"'P.S. Your kind letter of Aug. 30th just come. They must be very clever to have found us here. I am dredfully cutt up to hear dear Governor not at all well when you wrote. Shall hope for better news every day. There is a Greek gentleman here with a pill waranted to cure everything yet discovered. They are as large as yellow sluggs, and just the same shape. He will let me have 10 for my amathist studds which are no good to me. Shall try to send them by the next ship that goes home. Do write at once, because I never heard before of anything wrong with dear Governor.

"'T. R. W.'"

"Poor darling!" said his mother with tears in her eyes, while Nicie was sobbing quietly;

"by this time he may be aware of it perhaps, though not of the dreadful thing that happened since. It will not be for his happiness that he should ever know. Remember that, Inez. He is of so much vigour and high blood of the best Andalusian, that he would become insane, and perhaps do himself deep injury. He would cast away his office—what you call the Commission,—and come back to this country, and be put in prison for not accepting quietly the sacrilegious laws."

"Mother, you have promised never to speak of that subject. If it is too much for poor Tom, what is it likely to be for us? All we can do is to leave it to God."

"There is not the same God in this Country as we have. If there was, He would never endure it."

CHAPTER VI.

A WAGER.

It was true enough that Mr. Penniloe was gone to London, as Gronow said. But it was not true that otherwise he would have held a prayer-meeting every day in Lady Waldron's room, for the benefit of her case. He would have been a great support and strength to Inez in her anxiety, and doubtless would have joined his prayers with hers; that would have been enough for him. Dr. Gronow was a man who meant well upon the whole, but not in every crick and cranny, as a really fine individual does. But the Parson was even less likely than the Doctor, to lift a latch plugged by a lady against him.

"Thyatira, do you think that you could manage to see to the children, and the butcher's bill, during the course of next week," he enquired, when the pupils were off for their holiday, with accordions, and pan-

pipes and pea-shooters; "I have particular business in London. Only Betty Cork, and old Job Tapscott, have come to my readings of Solomon's Song, and both of them are as deaf as milestones. Master Harry will be home again in three days' time, and when he is in the house you have no fear; though your confidence should be placed much higher. Master Michael is stronger of late, and if we can keep shocking stories from him, his poor little head may be right again. There really has been no proof at all of the existence of any Spring-heeled Jack; and he would never come here to earn his money. He may have been mentioned in Prophecy, as the Wesleyan Minister declared, but I have failed to come across the passage. Our Church does not deal in those exciting views, and does not recognise dark lanterns."

"No sir, we are much soberer like; but still there remains the Seven Vials."

The Parson was up to snuff—if the matter may be put upon so low a footing. Mrs. Muggridge had placed her arms akimbo, in challenge Theological. He knew that her views were still the lowest of the low, and could not be hoisted by any petard to the High Church level. And the worst of it is

that such people are pat with awkward points of Holy Writ, as hard to parry as the stroke of Jarnac. In truth he must himself confess that partly thus had Thyatira, at an early and impressible age, been induced to join the Church, when there chanced to be a vacancy for a housemaid at the Parsonage. It was in his father's parish, where her father, Stephen Muggridge, occupied a farm belonging to the Rev. Isaac Penniloe. Philip, as a zealous Churchman, urged that the Parson's chief tenant should come to church, but the Rev. Isaac took a larger view, preferring his tangible cornland to his spiritual Vineyard.

"You had better let Stephen alone," he said, "you would very soon get the worst of it, with all your new Oxford theology. Farmer Steve is a wonderfully stout Antipædobaptist; and he searches the Scriptures every day, which leaves no chance for a Churchman, who can only find time on a Saturday."

This dissuasion only whetted the controversial appetite, and off set Philip with his Polyglot Bible under his arm. When Farmer Stephen saw him coming, he smiled a grim and gallant smile, being equally hot for the combat. Says he, after a few preliminary passes,

"Now, young sir, look here! I'll show 'e

a text as you can't explain away, with all Oxford College at the back of thee. Just you turn to Gospel of John, third chapter and fifth verse, and you read it, after me. 'Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.' The same in your copy, bain't it now? Then according to my larning, m. a. n. spells *man*, and b. a. b. e. spells *babe*. Now till you can put b. a. b. e. in the place of m. a. n. in that there text, what becomes of your Church baptism?"

The farmer grinned gently at the Parson, in the pride of triumph, and looked round for his family to share it.

"Farmer Stephen, that sounds well;" replied the undaunted Philip, "but perhaps you will oblige me, by turning over a few leaves, as far as the sixteenth chapter of the same Gospel, and verse twenty-one. You see how it begins with reference to the pains of a mother, and then occur these words—'she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a *man* is born into the world.' Now was that man born full-grown, Farmer Stephen?"

The farmer knitted his brows, and stared; there was no smile left upon his face; but in lieu of it came a merry laugh from beside his

big oaken chair; and the head of her class in the village school was studying his countenance.

"Her can go to Parsonage," quoth the Antipædobaptist, "her won't take no harm in a household where they know their Bible so."

Farmer Stephen was living still; and like a gentleman had foregone all attempts to recapture his daughter. With equal forbearance, Penniloe never pressed his own opinions concerning smaller matters upon his pious housekeeper, and therefore was fain to decline, as above, her often proffered challenges.

"There are many things still very dark before us," he answered with his sweet sad smile; "let us therefore be instant in prayer, while not neglecting our worldly duties. It is a worldly duty now, which takes me from my parish, much against my own desires. I shall not stay an hour more than can be helped, and shall take occasion to forward, if I can, the interests of our restoration fund."

Mrs. Muggridge, when she heard of that, was ready at once to do her best. Not that she cared much about the church repairs, but that her faithful heart was troubled by her master's heavy anxieties. As happens (without any one established exception) in such cases, the outlay had proved to be vastly vaster than

the most exhaustive estimate. Mr. Penniloe felt himself liable for the repayment of every farthing; and though the contractors at Exeter were most lenient and considerate (being happily a firm of substance), his mind was much tormented—at the lower tides of faith—about it. At least twelve hundred pounds was certain to fall due at Christmas, that season of peace and good-will for all Christians, who can pay for it. Even at that date there were several good and useful Corporations, Societies, Associations, ready to help the Church of England, even among white men, when the case was put well before them. The Parson had applied by letter vainly; now he hoped to see the people, and get a trifle out of them.

The long and expensive journey, and the further expense of the sojourn, were quite beyond his resources—drained so low by the House of the Lord—but now the solicitors to the estate of Sir Thomas Waldron Bart. deceased required his presence in London for essential formalities, and gladly provided the *viaticum*. Therefore he donned his warmest clothes, for the weather was becoming wintry, put the oilskin over his Sunday hat—a genuine beaver, which had been his father's, and started in life at two guineas, and even now in its

Curate stage might stand out for twenty-one shillings—and committing his household solemnly to the care of the Almighty, met the first up-coach before daylight on Monday, when it changed horses at the *Blue Ball* Inn, at the north-east corner of his parish.

All western coaches had been quickened lately by tidings of steam in the North, which would take a man nearly a score of miles in one hour; and though nobody really believed in this, the mere talk of it made the horses go. There was one coach already, known by the rather profane name of *Quicksilver*, which was said to travel at the almost impious pace of twelve miles an hour. But few had much faith in this break-neck tale, and the *Quicksilver* flew upon the southern road, which never comes nigh the Perle valley. Even so, there were coaches on this upper road which averaged nine miles an hour all the way, foregoing for the sake of empty speed, breakfast, and dinner, and even supper on the road. By one of these called the *Tallyho*, Mr. Penniloe booked his place for London, and arrived there in good health but very tired, early on the Tuesday morning.

The curate of Perlycross was not at all of the rustic parson type, such as may still be found in many an out-of-the-way parish of Devon.

He was not likely to lose himself in the streets of "Mighty Babylon," as London was generally called in those days—and he showed some perception of the right thing to do, by putting up at the "Old Hummums." His charges for the week were borne by the lawyers, upon whose business he was come; and therefore the whole of his time was placed at the disposal of their agents, Messrs. Spindrift, Honeysweet, and Hoblin, of Theobald's Road, Gray's Inn. That highly respected firm led him about from office to office, and pillar to post, sometimes sitting upon the pillar, sometimes leaning against the post, according to the usage immemorial of their learned Profession. But one of the things he was resolved to do between Doe and Roe, and Nokes and Styles, was to see his old friend Harrison Gowler, concerning the outrage at Perlycross.

There happened to be a great run now upon that eminent Physician, because he had told a lady of exalted rank, who had a loose tendon somewhere, that she had stepped on a piece of orange-peel five and twenty years ago. Historical research proved this to be too true, although it had entirely escaped the august patient's memory. Dr. Gowler became of course a Baronet at once, his practice was

doubled, though it had been very large, and so were all his fees, though they had not been small. In a word, he was the rage, and was making golden hay in the full blaze of a Royal sun.

No wonder then that the simple friend for a long time sought the great man vainly. He could not very well write, to ask for an interview on the following day, because he never knew at what hour he might hope to be delivered from the lawyers; and it never occurred to him to prepay the postage of his card from door to table, through either of the haughty footmen. Slow as he was to take offence, he began to fear that it must be meant, for the name of his hotel was on his cards; until as he was turning away once more, debating with himself whether self-respect would allow him to lift that brass knocker again, the great man himself came point-blank upon him. The stately footman had made a rush for his pint of half-and-half round the corner, and Sir Harrison had to open his own door to show a noble patient forth.

"What, you in London, Penniloe!" And a kind grasp of the hand made it clear, that the physician was not himself to blame. In a few quick words it was arranged that the Parson should call again at six o'clock, and share his

old friend's simple meal. "We shall have two good hours for a talk," said Gowler, "for all the great people are at dinner then. At eight, I have a consultation on."

"I never have what can be called a dinner;" Sir Harrison said, when they met again; "only a bit of—I forget what the Greek expression is. There is an American turn for it."

"You must indeed be overdone, if you are forgetting your Greek," replied his friend; "you were far in front of me there always; though I think I was not so far behind, in Latin."

"I think you were better in both. But what matter? We have little time now for such delights. How often I wish I were back again at Oxford; ten times poorer, but a thousand times happier. What is the good of my hundred pounds a day? I often get that; and am ashamed of it."

The Parson refrained from quoting any of the plentiful advice upon that matter, from the very highest authorities. He tried to look cheerfully at his old friend, and did not even shake his head. But a very deep sadness was in his own heart; and yet a confirmation of his own higher faith.

Then knowing that the time was very short,

and feeling his duty to his own parish, he told the tale he was come to tell; and Sir Harrison listened intently to it.

"I scarcely know what to think," he said; "even if I were on the spot, and knew every one whom it was possible to suspect, it would be a terrible puzzle to me. One thing may be said, with confidence, amounting almost to certainty, that it is not a medical matter at all. That much I can settle, beyond all doubt, by means which I need not specify. Even with you I cannot enter upon questions so professional. We know that irregular things are done, and the folly of the law compels them. But this is quite out of the course they pursue. However I can make quite certain about all that within a week. Meanwhile you should look for a more likely clue. You have lost invaluable time by concluding, as of course the stupid public would, especially after all the Burke and Hare affairs, that 'the doctors must be at the bottom of it.' Most unlucky that you were so unwell, or you might have set the enquiry on the right track from the first. Surely it must have occurred to you that medical men, as a general rule, are the sharpest fellows of the neighbourhood, except of course—of course excepting the parsons?"

"They are sharper than we are," said the Parson with a smile; "but perhaps that is the very thing that tells against our faith in them."

"Very likely. But still it keeps them from utterly mad atrocities. Sir Thomas Waldron, a famous man, a grand old soldier, and above all a wealthy man! Why they could have done no more to a poor old wretch from the workhouse!"

"The crime in that case would have been as great; perhaps greater, because more cowardly."

"You always were a highflyer, my friend. But never mind the criminality. What we want to know is the probability. And to find out that, we have to study not the laws of morality, but the rules of human conduct. What was the name of the man I met about the case, at your house? Oh, I remember—Gronow; a very shrewd clear-headed fellow. Well, what does he say about it?"

"As nearly as possible what you have said. Some slight suspicion has fallen upon him. But as I told you, Jemmy Fox has come in for the lion's share of it."

"Poor young fellow! It must be very hard to bear. It will make him hate a Profession in which he would have been sure to distinguish himself, because he really loves it. What a

thick-headed monster the English public is! They always exult in a wild-goose chase. Are you sure that the body was ever carried off at all?"

"The very question Doctor Gronow asked! Unhappily, there can be no doubt whatever upon that point. As I ought to have told you, though I was not there to see it, the search was made in the middle of the day, and with a dozen people round the grave. They went to the bottom, found the brickwork broken down, and no sign of any coffin."

"Well, that ought to lead us to something clear. That alone is almost certain proof of what I said just now. 'Resurrection-men,' as the stupid public calls them—would have taken the body alone. Not only because they escape all charge of felony by doing so, but that it is so much easier; and for many other reasons which you may imagine. I begin to see my way more clearly. Depend upon it, this is some family matter. Some private feud, or some motive of money, or perhaps even some religious scruple lies at the bottom of this strange affair. I begin to think that you will have to go to Spain, before you understand it all. How has Lady Waldron behaved about it?"

"She has been most bitter against poor Jemmy." Mr. Penniloe had not heard of what was happening this very week at Walderscourt. "She will not see him, will not hear his name, and is bitter against any one who takes his part. She cannot even bring herself to speak to me, because in common fairness I have done my best for him, against the general opinion, and her own firm conclusion. That is one reason why I am in London now. She will not even act with me in taking probate of the will. In fact it has driven her, as I fear, almost to the verge of insanity; for she behaves most unkindly even to her daughter. But she is more to be pitied than blamed, poor thing."

"I agree with you; in case of all this being genuine. But is it so? Or is it a bit of acting over-acted? I have known women, who could act so as to impose upon their own brains."

"It has never once entered my head," replied the simple-minded Parson, "to doubt that all she says, and does, is genuine. Even you could not doubt, if you beheld her."

"I am not so sure of that," observed Sir Harrison very drily; "the beauty of your character is the grand simplicity. You have not the least idea of any wickedness."

"My dear fellow," cried the Parson deeply

shocked; "it is, alas, my sad duty to find out and strive with the darkest cases of the depravity of our fallen race!"

"Of course. But you think none the worse of them for that. It is water on a duck's back, to such a man as you. Well, have it so; if you like. I see the worst of their bodies, and you the worst of their souls, as you suppose. But I think you put some of your own into them—infusion of sounder blood, as it were."

"Gowler, you may think as ill, as fallen nature can make you think, of all your fellow-creatures;" Mr. Penniloe spoke with a sharpness very seldom found in words of his. "But in fair truth, it is beyond the blackest of all black bitterness to doubt poor Lady Waldron's simple and perfect sincerity."

"Because of her very magnificent eyes," Sir Harrison answered, as if to himself, and to meet his own too charitable interjections. "But what has she done, to carry out her wild revenge at an outrage, which she would feel more keenly perhaps than the most sensitive of English women? Has she moved high and low, ransacked the earth, set all the neighbourhood on fire, and appealed with tears, and threats, and money, (which is the strongest of all appeals) to the Cæsar enthroned in London?

If she had done any of these things, I fancy I should have heard of them."

For the moment Mr. Penniloe disliked his friend; as a man may feel annoyance at his own wife even, when her mind for some trivial cause is moving on a lower level than his own.

"As yet she has not taken any strong steps," he confessed with some reluctance; "because she has been obliged to act under her lawyer's guidance. Remember that she is a foreigner, and knows nothing of our legal machinery."

"Very likely not. But Webber does—Webber her solicitor. I suppose Webber has been very energetic?"

"He has not done so much as one might have expected. In fact he has seemed to me rather remiss. He has had his own private hands at work, which as he says is the surest plan; but he has brought no officers from London down. He tells me that in all such cases they have failed; and more than that, they have entirely spoiled the success of all private enquiry."

"It looks to me very much as if private enquiry had no great desire to succeed. My conclusion grows more and more irresistible. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"My dear fellow, by all means do. I shall attach very great importance to it."

"It is simply this," Sir Harrison spoke less rapidly than usual; "all your mystery is solved in this—*Lady Waldron knows all about it.* How you all have missed that plain truth, puzzles me. She has excellent reasons for restricting the enquiry, and casting suspicion upon poor Fox. Did I not hear of a brother of hers, a Spanish nobleman I think he was?"

"Yes, her twin-brother, the Count de Vareas. She has always been warmly attached to him; but Sir Thomas did not like him much. I think he has been extravagant. Lady Waldron has been doing her utmost to discover him."

"I dare say. To be sure she has! Advertised largely of course. Oh dear, oh dear! What poor simple creatures we men are, in comparison with women!"

Mr. Penniloe was silent. He had made a good dinner, and taken a glass of old port-wine; and both those proceedings were very rare with him. Like all extremely abstemious men, when getting on in years, he found his brain not strengthened, but confused, by the unusual supply. The air of London had upon him that effect which it often has at first upon

visitors from the country—quick increase of appetite, and hearty joy in feeding.

"Another thing you told me, which confirms my view," resumed the relentless Doctor—"the last thing discovered before you came away—but not discovered, mark you, by her ladyship's agents—was that the cart supposed to have been employed had been traced to a smuggler's hiding place, in a desolate and unfrequented spot, probably in the direction of the coast. Am I right in supposing that?"

"Partly so. It would be towards the sea; though certainly not the shortest way."

"But the best way probably of getting at the coast, if you wished to avoid towns and villages? That you admit? Then all is plain. Poor Sir Thomas was to be exported. Probably to Spain. That I will not pretend to determine; but I think it most likely. Perhaps to be buried in Catholic soil, and with Catholic ceremonial; which they could not do openly here, because of his own directions. How simple the very deepest mystery becomes, when once you have the key to it! But how strange that it never occurred to you! I should have thought Gronow at any rate would have guessed it."

"He has more penetration than I have; I

am well aware of that," replied the humble Parson; "and you of course have more than either of us. But for all that, Gowler, and although I admit that your theory is very plausible, and explains many points that seemed inexplicable, I cannot, and I will not accept it for a moment."

"Where is your difficulty? Is it not simple—consistent with all that we know of such people, priest-ridden of course, and double-faced, and crafty? Does it not solve every difficulty? What can you urge against it?"

"My firm belief in the honesty, affection, and good faith of women."

"Whew!" The great physician forgot his dignity, in the enjoyment of so fine a joke. He gave a long whistle, and then put his thumb to his nose, and extended his fingers, as schoolboys of that period did. "Honesty of women, Penniloe! At your age, you surely know better than that. A very frail argument indeed."

"Because of my age it is perhaps that I do know better. I would rather not discuss the subject. You have your views; and I have mine."

"I am pleased with this sort of thing, because it reminds one so much of boyhood;" Sir Harrison stood by the fire, and began to consult

his short gray locks. "Let me see, how many years is it, since I cherished such illusions? Well, they are pleasant enough, while they last. I suppose you never make a bet, Penniloe?"

"Of course not, Gowler. You seem to be as ignorant of clergymen, as you are of women."

"Don't be touchy, my dear fellow. Many of the cloth accept the odds, and have privilege of clergy when they lose. Well, I'll tell you what I will do. You see that little cupboard in the panelling? It has only one key, and the lock is peculiar. Here I deposit—behold my act and deed—these two fifty-pound notes. You take the key. Now you shall come, or send either churchwarden, and carry them off for the good of your church-restoration fund, the moment you can prove that my theory is wrong."

"I am not sure," said the clergyman, with a little agitation, as the courage of that single glass of port declined, "that this is not too much in the nature of a wager."

"No, there is no wager. That requires two parties. It is simply a question of forfeiture. No peril to a good cause—as you would call it—in case of failure. And a solid gain to it, if I prove wrong. Take the key, my friend. My time is up."

Mr. Penniloe, the most conscientious of mankind, and therefore the most gentle, had still some qualms about the innocence of this. But his friend's presumptuous manner hushed them. He dropped the key into his deep watch-pocket, specially secured against the many rogues of London; and there it was when he mounted on the *Magnet* coach, at two o'clock on the Friday afternoon, prepared for a long and dreary journey to his home.

The *Magnet* was one of those calm and considerate coaches which thought a great deal more of the comfort and safety of their passengers and horses, than of the fidgety hands of any clock—be it even a cathedral clock—on the whole road from London to Exeter. What are the most important hours of the day? Manifestly those of feeding. Each of them is worth any other three. Therefore you lose three times the time you save, by omitting your dinner. This coach breakfasted, dined, and supped, and slept on the road, or rather out of it, and started again as fresh as paint, quite early enough in the morning.

With his usual faith in human nature, Mr. Penniloe had not enquired into these points, but concluded that this coach would rush along in the breathless manner of the *Tallyho*. This

leisurely course began to make him very nervous, and when on the Saturday at two o'clock, another deliberate halt was made at a little wayside inn, some fifty miles still from Perlycross, and every one descended with a sprightly air, the clergyman marched up to the coachman to remonstrate.

"Unless we get on a little faster," he said, with a kind but anxious smile; "I shall not be at home for Sunday."

"Can't help that, sir. The coach must dine;" replied the fat driver, as he pulled his muffler down, to give his capacious mouth fair play.

"But—but consider, Mr. Coachman; I must get home. I have my church to serve."

"Must serve the dinner first, sir, if you please," said the landlord coming forward with a napkin, which he waved as if it were worth a score of sermons; "all the gents are waiting, sir, for you to say the grace—hot soup, knuckle of veal, boiled round, and baked potatoes. Gents has to pay, if they dine, or if they don't. Knowing this, all gents does dine. Preach all the better, sir, to-morrow for it."

If this preparation were needful, the curate's sermon would not have been excellent, for anxiety had spoiled his appetite. When at length they lumbered on again, he strove to

divert his thoughts by observing his fellow-passengers. And now for the first time he descried, over the luggage piled on the roof, a man with a broad slouched hat and fur cloak, who sat with his back towards him, for Mr. Penniloe had taken his place on the hinder part of the coach. That man had not joined the dinner party, yet no one remained on the coach or in it during the dinner hour; for the weather was cold and windy, with a few flakes of snow flying idly all day, and just making little ribs of white upon the road. Mr. Penniloe was not a very observant man, least of all on a Saturday, when his mind was dwelling chiefly upon Scriptural subjects; but he could not help wondering how this man came there; for the coach had not stopped since they left the little inn.

This perhaps drew his attention to the man, who appeared to be "thoroughly a foreigner," as John Bull in those days expressed it. For he wore no whiskers, but a long black beard streaked with silver, as even those behind could see, for the whirl of the north wind tossed it now and then upon his left shoulder. He kept his head low behind the coachman's broad figure, and appeared to speak to nobody, but smoked cigars incessantly, lighting each from

the stump of its predecessor, and scattering much ash about, to the discomfort of his neighbours' eyes. Although Mr. Penniloe never smoked, he enjoyed the fragrance of a good cigar perhaps more than the puffer himself does (especially if he puff too vehemently) and he was able to pronounce this man's tobacco very fine.

At length they arrived at Pumpington about six miles from Perlycross, and here Mr. Penniloe fully expected another halt for supper, and had made up his mind in that case to leave the coach and trudge home afoot. But to his relief they merely changed horses, and did that with some show of alacrity; for they were bound to be at Exeter that night, and the snow was beginning to thicken. At the turnpike-gate two men got up; one of them a sailor, going probably to Plymouth, who mounted the tarpaulin that covered the luggage, and threw himself flat upon it with a jovial air, and made himself quite at home, smoking a short pipe, and waving a black bottle, when he could spare time from sucking it. The other man came and sat beside the Parson, who did not recognise him at first; for the coach carried only two lamps, both in front, and their light was thrown over their shoulders now and then, in rough streams, like the beard of the foreigner. All

the best coaches still carried a Guard, and the Royal Mail was bound to do so; but the *Magnet* towards the end of its career had none.

Mr. Penniloe meekly allowed the new-comer to edge his feet gradually out of the straw nest, and work his own into the heart of it; for now it was truly a shivering and a shuddering night. The steam of the horses and their breath came back in turbid clouds, and the snow, or soft hail (now known as *graupel*) cut white streaks through them into travellers' eyes, and danced on the roof like lozenges. Nobody opened mouth, except the sailor; and his was stopped, as well as opened, by the admirable fit of the neck of his rum-bottle. But this being over-strained became too soon a hollow consolation; and the rim of the glass rattled drily against his chattering teeth, till he cast it away.

"Never say die, mates. I'll sing you a song. Don Darkimo, give us a cigar to chaw. Never could smoke them things, gentlemen and ladies. Can't 'e speak, or won't 'e then? Never mind, here goes!"

To his own encouragement this jolly fellow, with his neck and chest thrown open, and his summer duds on, began to pour forth a rough nautical ballad, not only beyond the pale of the most generous orthodoxy, but entirely out

of harmony with the tone of all good society. In plainer words, as stupid a bit of ribaldry and blasphemy, as the most advanced period could produce.

Then up rose Mr. Penniloe, and in a firm voice clear above the piping of the wind, and the roar of wheels, and rattle of loose harness, administered to that mariner a rebuke so grave, and solemn, and yet so full of large kindness and of allowance for his want of teaching, that the poor fellow hung his head, and felt a rising in his throat, and being not advanced beyond the tender stage of intoxication, passed into a liquid state of terror and repentance.

With this the clergyman was content, being of longer experience than to indulge in further homily. But the moment he sat down, up rose the gentleman who had cribbed his straw, and addressed the applauding passengers.

"My friends, the Reverend Penniloe has spoken well and eloquently. But I think you will agree with me, that it would be more consistent of him, and more for the service of the Lord, if he kept his powers of reproof for the use of his own parishioners. He is the clergyman of Perlycross, a place notorious throughout the county for the most infamous

of crimes—a place where even the dead are not allowed to sleep in peace."

After this settler, the man sat down, and turned his back on the Parson, who had now recognised him, with deep sorrow at his low malevolence. For this was no other than Solomon Pack, watchmaker and jeweller at Pumpington, well known among his intimates as "Pack of lies," from his affection for malignant gossip. Mr. Penniloe had offended him by employing the rival tradesman, Pack's own brother-in-law, with whom he was at bitter enmity.

"Mr. Pack, you have done much harm, I fear; and this is very unjust of you"—was all that the Parson deigned to say. But he had observed with some surprise, that while Pack was speaking, the foreigner turned round and gazed intently, without showing much of his swarthy face, at himself—Philip Penniloe.

Before silence was broken again, the *Magnet* drew up at the *Blue Bull* Inn, where the lane turns off towards Perlycross, and the clergyman leaving his valise with the landlord, started upon his three-mile trudge. But before he had walked more than a hundred yards he was surprised to see, across the angle of the common, that the coach had stopped again at

the top of a slight rise, where a footpath led from the turnpike road towards the northern entrance to Walderscourt. The clouds were now dispersing, and the full moon shining brightly, and the ground being covered with newly fallen snow, the light was as good as it is upon many a winter afternoon. Mr. Pennilee was wearing a pair of long-sight glasses, specially adapted to his use by a skilful optician in London, and he was as proud of them as a child is of his first whistle. Without them, the coach might have been a haystack, or a whale, so far as he could tell; with them he could see the horses, and the passengers, and the luggage.

Having seen too much of that coach already, he was watching it merely as a test for his new glasses; and the trial proved most satisfactory. "How proud Fay will be," he was thinking to himself, "when I tell her that I can see the big pear-tree from the window, and even the thrushes on the lawn!" But suddenly his interest in the sight increased. The man, who was standing in the road with his figure shown clearly against a snowy bank, was no other than that dark foreigner, who had stared at him so intently. There was the slouched hat, and there was the fur cloak, and

even the peculiar bend of the neck. A parcel was thrown to him from the roof, and away he went across the common, quite as if he knew the way, through furze and heather, to the back entrance of Walderscourt grounds. He could not see the Parson in the darker lane below, and doubtless believed himself unseen.

The circumstance aroused some strange ideas in the candid mind of Penniloe. That man, knowing who he was from Pack's tirade, must have been desirous to avoid him, otherwise he would have quitted the coach at the *Blue Ball*, and taken this better way to Walderscourt; for the lane Mr. Penniloe was following led more directly thither by another entrance. What if there were something, after all, in Gowler's too plausible theory? That man looked like a Spaniard, probably a messenger from Lady Waldron's scapegrace brother; for that was his character if plain truth were spoken, without any family gloss upon it. And if he were a messenger, why should he come thus, unless there were something they wanted to conceal?

The Curate had not traversed all this maze of meditations, which made him feel very miserable—for of all things he hated suspiciousness, and that £100, though needed so

sadly, would be obtained at too high a cost, if the cost were his faith in womankind—when, lo, his own church-tower rose grandly before him, its buttresses and stringing courses capped with sparkling snow, and the yew-tree by the battlements feathered with the same, and away to the east the ivy mantle of the Abbey, laced and bespangled with the like caprice of beauty, showered from the glittering stores of heaven.

He put on a spurt through the twinkling air, and the frozen snow crunched beneath his rapid feet; and presently he had shaken hands with Muggridge, and Fay in her nightgown made a reckless leap from the height of ten stairs into his gladsome arms.

CHAPTER VII.

A SERMON IN STONE.

Now Sergeant Jakes was not allowed to chastise any boys on Sunday. This made the day hang very heavy on his hands; and as misfortunes never come single, the sacred day robbed him of another fine resource. For Mr. Penniloe would not permit even Muggridge, the pious, the sage, and the prim, to receive any visitors—superciliously called by the front-door people "followers"—upon that blessed day of rest, when surely the sweeter side of human nature is fostered and inspirited, from reading-desk and lectern, from gallery and from pulpit.

However even clergymen are inconsistent, as their own wives acknowledge confidentially; and Mr. Penniloe's lectures upon Solomon's Song—a treatise then greatly admired, as a noble allegory, by High Churchmen—were not enforced at home by any warmth of practice.

Thus stood the law; and of all offences upon the Sergeant's Hecatologue, mutiny was the most heinous; therefore he could not mutiny.

But surely if Mr. Penniloe could have received, or conceived, a germ of the faintest suspicion concerning this faithful soldier's alternatives on the afternoon of the Sabbath—as Churchmen still entitled it—he would have thrown open every door of kitchen, back-kitchen, scullery, and even pantry to him, that his foot might be kept from so offending. Ay, and more than his foot, his breast, and arm—the only arm he had, and therefore leaving no other blameless.

It is most depressing to record the lapse of such a lofty character, so gallant, faithful, self-denying, true, austere, and simple—though some of these merits may be refused him, when the truth comes out—as, alas, it must. All that can be pleaded in his favour, is that ancient, threadbare, paltry, and (as must even be acknowledged) dastardly palliation—the woman tempted him, and he fell! Fell from his brisk and jaunty mien, his noble indifference to the fair, and severity to their little ones, his power of example to the rising age, and his pure-minded loyalty to Thyatira, watered by rivers of tea, and fed by acres of bread and butter.

And the worst of it was, that he had sternly resolved, with haughty sense of right, and hearty scorn of a previous slip towards backsliding, that none of this weakness should ever, even in a vision, come anigh him any more. Yet see, how easily this rigid man was wound round the finger of a female "teener"—as the Americans beautifully express it!

He was sitting very sadly at his big black desk, one mild and melancholy Sabbath eve, with the light of the dull day fading out, and failing to make facets from the diamonds of the windows, and the heavy school-clock ticking feebly, as if it wished time was over; while shadows, that would have frightened any other unmarried man in the parish, came in from the silent population of the old churchyard, as if it were the haze of another world. A little cloud of smoke, to serve them up with their own sauce, would have consoled the schoolmaster; but he never allowed any smoking in this temple of the Muses, and as the light waned he lit his tallow candle, to finish the work that he had in hand.

This was a work of the highest criticism, to revise, correct, and arrange in order of literary merit all the summaries of the morning sermon prepared by the head-class in the school. Some

of these compositions were of extreme obscurity, and some conveyed very strange doctrinal views. He was inclined to award the palm to the following fine epitome, practical, terse, and unimpeachably orthodox—"The Sermon was, sir, that all men ort to be good, and never to do no wikked things whennever thay can help it." But while he yet paused, with long quill in hand, the heavy oak door from the inner yard was opened very gently, and a slender form attired in black appeared at the end of the long and gloomy room.

Firm of nerve as he was, the Master quailed a little at this unexpected sight; and therefore it became a very sweet relief, when the vision brightened into a living and a friendly damsel, and more than that, a very charming one. All firm resolutions like shadows vanished; instead of a stern and distant air and a very rigid attitude, a smile of delight and a bow of admiration betrayed the condition of his bosom.

That fair and artless Tamar knew exactly how to place herself to the very best advantage. She stood on the further side of the candle, so that its low uncertain light hovered on the soft curve of her cheeks, and came back in a flow of steady lustre from her large brown eyes. She brushed an unbidden tear away, and

timidly allowed those eyes to rest upon the man of learning. No longer was she the gay coquette, coying with frolic challenge, but the gentle, pensive, submissive maiden, appealing to a loftier mind. The Sergeant's tender heart was touched, up sprang his inborn chivalry; and he swept away with his strong right hand the efforts of juvenile piety, and the lessons of Holy Writ.

"Sergeant Schoolmaster, no chair for me;" Tamar began in a humble voice, as he offered his own official seat. "I have but a moment to spare, and I fear you will be so angry with me, for intruding upon you like this. But I am so—oh so unhappy!"

"What is it, my dear? Who has dared to vex you? Tell me his name, and although it is Sunday—ah just let me come across him!"

"Nobody, nobody, Sergeant Schoolmaster;" here she pulled out a handkerchief, which a woman would have pronounced, at a glance, the property of her mistress. "Oh how shall I dare to tell you who it is?"

"I insist upon knowing," said the Sergeant boldly, taking the upper hand, because the maiden looked so humble; "I insist upon knowing who it is, this very moment."

"Then if I must tell, if you won't let me off," she answered with a sweet glance, and a sweeter smile; "it is nobody else but Sergeant Jakes himself."

"Me!" exclaimed the veteran; "whatever have I done? You know that I would be the last in all the world to vex you."

"Oh it is because you are so fierce. And that of course is, because you are so brave."

"But my dear, my pretty dear, how could I ever be fierce to you?"

"Yes, you are going to cane my brother Billy, in the morning."

This was true beyond all cavil—deeply and beautifully true. The Sergeant stared, and frowned a little. Justice must allow no dalliance.

"And oh, he has got such chilblains, sir! Two of them broke only yesterday, and will be at their worst in the morning. And he didn't mean it, sir, oh he never meant it, when he called you an 'Old beast'!"

"The discipline of the school must be maintained." Mr. Jakes stroked his beard, which was one of the only pair then grown in the parish, (the other being Dr. Gronow's) for the growth of a beard in those days argued a radical and cantankerous spirit, unless it were

that of a military man. Without his beard Mr. Jakes would not have inspired half the needful awe: and he stroked it now with dignity, though the heart beneath it was inditing of an *infra dig.* idea. "Unhappily he did it, Miss, in the presence of the other boys. It cannot be looked over."

"Oh what can I do, Sergeant? What can I do? I'll do anything you tell me, if you'll only let him off."

The Schoolmaster gave a glance at all the windows. They were well above the level of the ground outside. No one could peep in, without standing on a barrel, or getting another boy to give him a leg up.

"Tamar, do you mean what you say?" he enquired, with a glance of mingled tenderness and ferocity—the tenderness for her, the ferocity for her brother.

"If you have any doubt, you have only got to try me. There can't be any harm in that much, can there?" She looked at him, with a sly twinkle in her eyes, as much as to say—"Well now, come, don't be so bashful."

Upon that temptation, this long-tried veteran fell from his loyalty and high position. He approached the too fascinating damsel, took her pretty hand, and whispered something through

her lovely curls. Alas, the final word of his conditions of abject surrender was one which rhymed with "this," or "Miss," or—that which it should have been requited with—a hiss. Oh Muggridge, Muggridge, where were you? Just stirring a cup of unbefriended tea, and meditating on this man's integrity!

"Oh you are too bad, too bad, Sergeant!" exclaimed the young girl starting back, with both hands lifted, and a most becoming blush. "I never did—I never could have thought that you had any mind for such trifles. Why, what would all the people say, if I were only to mention it?"

"Nobody would believe you;" replied Mr. Jakes, to quench that idea, while he trembled at it; adding thereby to his iniquities.

"Well perhaps they wouldn't. No I don't believe they would. But everybody likes a bit of fun sometimes. But we won't say another word about it."

"Won't we though? I have got a new cane, Tamar—the finest I ever yet handled for spring. The rarest thing to go round chilblains. Bargain, or no bargain, now?"

"Bargain!" she cried; "but I couldn't do it now. It must be in a more quieter place. Besides you might cheat me, and cane him

after all. Oh it is too bad, too bad to think of. Perhaps I might try, next Sunday."

"But where shall I see you, next Sunday, my dear? 'Never put off; it gives time for to scoff.' Give me one now, and I'll stick to it."

"No, Sergeant Jakes. I don't like to tell you, and my father would be so angry. But I don't see what right he has to put me in there. And oh, it is so lonely! And I am looking out for ghosts, and never have a happy mouthful. That old woman will have something to answer for. But it's no good to ask me, Sergeant; because—because ever so many would be after me, if they only got a hint of it."

This of course was meant to stop him; but somehow it had quite the opposite effect; and at last he got out of the innocent girl the whole tale of her Sunday seclusion. The very best handmaid—as everybody knows—will go through the longest and bitterest bout of soaking, shivering, freezing, starving, dragging under wheels, and being blown up to the sky, rather than forego her "Sunday out." Miss Tamar Haddon was entitled always to this Sabbath travail; and such was her courage that have it she would, though it blew great guns, and rained cats and dogs.

Now, her father, as may have been said before, was Walter Haddon of the *Ivy-bush*, as respectable a man as ever lived, and very fond of his children. This made him anxious for their welfare; and welfare meaning even then —though not so much as now it does—fair wealth, and farewell poverty, Mr. Haddon did his best to please his wealthy aunt, a childless widow who lived at Perlycombe. For this old lady had promised to leave her money among his children, if they should fail to offend her. In that matter it was a hundredfold easier to succeed, than it was to fail; for her temper was diabolical. Poor Tamar, being of flippant tongue, had already succeeded fatally; and the first question Mrs. Pods always asked, before she got out of her pony-carriage, was worded thus—"Is that minx Tamar in the house?"

Whatever the weather might be, this lady always drove up with her lame pony to the door of the *Ivy-bush*, at half-past one of a Sunday, expecting to find a good hot dinner, and hot rum and water afterwards. For all this refreshment she never paid a penny, but presented the children with promises of the fine things they might look forward to. And thus, like too many other rich people, she kept all her capital to herself, and contrived to get

posthumous interest upon it, on the faith of contingent remainders.

Now Tamar's mother was dead; and her father knowing well that all the young sparks of the village were but as the spoils of her bows and bonnets, had contrived a very clever plan for keeping her clear of that bitter Mrs. Pods, without casting her into the way of yokel youths, and spry young bachelors of low degree. At the back of his hostelry stood the old Abbey, covered with great festoons of ivy, from which the Inn probably took its name; and the only entrance to the ruins was by the arched gateway at the end of his yard, other approaches having been walled up; and the key of the tall iron gate was kept at this Inn for the benefit of visitors.

The walls of the ancient building could scarcely be seen anywhere for the ivy; and the cloisters and roofless rooms inside were overgrown with grass and briars. But one large chamber, at the end of a passage, still retained its vaulted ceiling, and stone pavement scarred with age. Perhaps it had been the refectory, for at one side was a deep fireplace, where many a hearty log had roared; at present its chief business was to refresh Miss Tamar Haddon. A few sticks kindled in the old

fireplace, and a bench from the kitchen of the Inn, made it a tolerable keeping-room, at least in the hours of daylight; though at night the bold Sergeant himself might have lacked the courage for sound slumber there.

To this place was the fair Tamar banished, for the sake of the moneybags of Mrs. Pods, from half-past one till three o'clock, on her Sunday visits to the *Ivy-bush*. Hither the fair maid brought her dinner, steaming in a basin hot, and her father's account-book of rough jottings, which it was her business to verify and interpret; for, as is the duty of each newer generation, she had attained to higher standard of ennobling scholarship.

In a few words now she gave the loving Sergeant a sketch of this time-serving policy, and her exile from the paternal dinner-table, which aroused his gallant wrath; and then she told him how she had discovered entrance unknown to her father, at a spot where a thicket of sycamores, at the back of the ruins, concealed a loop-hole not very difficult to scale. She could make her escape by that way, if she chose, after her father had locked her in, if it were not for spoiling her Sunday frock. And if her father went on so, for the sake of pleasing that ugly old frump, she was blest if she would

not try that plan, and sit on the river bank far below, as soon as the Spring dried up the rubbish. But if the Sergeant thought it worth his while, to come and afford her a little good advice, perhaps he might discover her Sunday hat waving among the ivy.

This enamoured veteran accepted tryst, with a stout heart, but frail conscience. The latter would haply have prevailed, if only the wind had the gift of carrying words which the human being does not utter, but thinks and forms internally. For the sly maid to herself said this, while she hastened to call her big brother Watty, to see her safe back to Walderscourt.

"What a poor old noodle! As if I cared twopence, how much he whacks Billy! Does he think I would ever let him come anigh me, if it wasn't to turn him inside out? Now if it were Low Jarks, his young brother, that would be quite another pair of shoes."

On the following Sunday it was remarked, by even the less observant boys, that their venerated Master was not wearing his usual pair of black Sunday breeches, with purple worsted stockings showing a wiry and muscular pair of legs. Strange to say, instead of those, he had his second-best small-clothes on, with dark brown gaiters to the knee, and a pair of

thick laced shoes, instead of Sunday pumps with silk rosettes. So wholly unversed in craft, as yet, was this good hero of a hundred fights. Thyatira also marked this change, with some alarm and wonder; but little dreamed she in her simple faith of any rival Delilah.

Mr. Penniloe's sermon, that Sunday morning, was of a deeply moving kind. He felt that much was expected of him, after his visit to London; where he must have seen the King and Queen, and they might even have set eyes on him. He put his long-sight glasses on, so that he could see anybody that required preaching at; and although he was never a cushion-thumper, he smote home to many a too comfortable bosom. Then he gave them the soft end of the rod to suck, as a conscientious preacher always does, after smiting hip and thigh, with a weapon too indigenous. In a word, it was an admirable sermon, and one even more to be loved than admired, inasmuch as it tended to spread good-will among men, as a river that has its source in heaven.

Sergeant Jakes, with his stiff stock on, might be preached at for ever, without fetching a blink. He sat bolt upright, and every now and then flapped the stump of his left arm against his sound heart, not with any eagerness

to drive the lesson home, but in proof of cordial approbation of hits, that must tell upon his dear friends round about. One cut especially was meant for Farmer John; and he was angry with that thick-skinned man, for staring at another man, as if it were for him. And then there was a passage, that was certain to come home to his own brother Robert, who began to slaughter largely, and was taking quite money enough to be of interest to the pulpit. But everybody present seemed to Jakes to be applying everything to everybody else—a disinterested process of the noblest turn of thought.

However those who have much faith—and who can fail to have some?—in the exhortations of good men who practise their own preaching, would have been confirmed in their belief by this man's later conduct. Although the body of the church had been reopened for some weeks now, with the tower-arch finished and the south wall rebuilt, yet there were many parts still incomplete, especially the chancel where the fine stone screen was being erected as a reredos; and this still remained in the builder's hands, with a canvas partition hiding it.

When the congregation had dispersed, Mr. Jakes slipped in behind that partition, and stood by a piece of sculpture which he always

had admired. In a recess of the northern wall, was a kneeling figure in pure white marble of a beautiful maiden claimed by death on the very eve of her wedding-day. She slept in the Waldron vaults below; while here the calm sweet face, portrayed in substance more durable than ours, spoke through everlasting silence of tenderness, purity, and the more exalted love.

The Sergeant stood with his hard eyes fixed upon that tranquil countenance. It had struck him more than once that Tamar's face was something like it; and he had come to see whether that were so. He found that he had been partly right, but in more important matters wrong. In profile, general outline, and the rounding of the cheeks, there was a manifest resemblance. But in the expression and quality of the faces, what a difference! Here all was pure, refined and noble, gentle, placid, spiritual. There all was tempting, flashing, tricksome, shallow, earthly, sensuous.

He did not think those evil things, for he was not a physiognomist; but still he felt the good ones; and his mind being in the better tone—through commune with the preacher's face, which does more than the words sometimes, when all the heart is in it—the wonted look of firmness, and of defiance of the Devil, returned

to his own shrewd countenance. The gables of his eyebrows, which had expanded and grown shaky, came back to their proper span and set; he nodded sternly, as if in pursuit of himself with a weapon of chastisement; and his mouth closed as hard as a wrench-hammer does, with the last turn of the screw upon it. Then he sneered at himself, and sighed as he passed the empty grave of his Colonel—what would that grand old warrior have thought of this desertion to the enemy?

But ashamed as he was of his weak surrender and treachery to his colours, his pride and plighted word compelled him to complete his enterprise. The Abbey stood near the churchyard wall, but on that side there was no entrance; and to get at the opposite face of the buildings, a roundabout way must be taken; and Jakes resolved now that he would not skulk by the lower path from the corner, but walk boldly across the meadow from the lane that led to Perlycombe. This was a back way with no house upon it, and according to every one's belief here must have lurked that horse and cart, on the night of that awful outrage.

Even to a one-handed man there was no great difficulty in entering one of the desolate

courts, by the loophole from the thicket; and there he met the fair recluse in a manner rather disappointing to her. Not that she cared at all to pursue her light flirtation with him, but that her vanity was shocked, when he failed to demand his sweet reward. And he called her "Miss Haddon," and treated her with a respect she did not appreciate. But she led him to her lonely bower, and roused up the fire for him, for the weather was becoming more severe, and she rallied him on his clemency, which had almost amounted to weakness, ever since he allowed her brother Billy to escape.

"Fair is fair, Miss;" the Master answered pensively. "As soon as you begin to let one off, you are bound to miss the rest of them."

"Who have they got to thank for that? I am afraid they will never know," she said with one of her most bewitching smiles, as she came and sat beside him. "Poor little chaps! How can I thank you for giving them such a nice time, Sergeant?"

The veteran wavered for a moment, as that comely face came nigh, and the glossy hair she had contrived to loosen fell almost on his shoulders. She had dressed herself in a killing manner, while a lover's knot of mauve-coloured

ribbon relieved the dullness of her frock, and enhanced the whiteness of her slender neck. But for all that, the Sergeant was not to be killed, and his mind was prepared for the crisis. He glanced around first, not for fear of anybody, but as if he desired witnesses; and then he arose from the bench, and looked at this seductive maiden, with eyes that had a steady sparkle, hard to be discomfited by any storm of flashes.

"Tamar," he said, "let us come to the point. I have been a fool; and you know it. You are very young; but somehow you know it. Now have you meant, from first to last, that you would ever think of marrying me?"

It never should have been put like that. Why you must never say a word, nor use your eyes except for reading, nor even look in your looking-glass, if things are taken in that way.

"Oh Sergeant, how you frighten me! I suppose I am never to smile again. Who ever dreamed of marrying?"

"Well, I did;" he answered with a twinkle of his eyes, and squaring of his shoulders. "I am not too old for everybody; but I am much too old for you. Do you think I would have

come here else? But it is high time to stop this fun."

"I don't call it fun at all;" said Tamar, fetching a little sob of fright. "What makes you look so cross at me?"

"I did not mean to look cross, my dear." The Sergeant's tender heart was touched. "I should be a brute, if I looked cross. It is the way the Lord has made my eyes. Perhaps they would never do for married life."

"That's the way all of them look," said Tamar; "unless they get everything they want. But you didn't look like that, last Sunday."

"No. But I ought. Now settle this. Would you ever think of marrying me?"

"No. Not on no account. You may be sure of that. Not even if you was dipped in diamonds." The spirit of the girl was up, and her true vulgarity came out.

"According to my opinion of you, that would make all the difference;" said the Sergeant, also firing up. "And now, Miss Haddon, let us say 'Good-bye.'"

"Let me come to myself, dear Sergeant Jakes. I never meant to be rude to you. But they do court me so different. Sit down for a minute. It is so lonely, and I have

heard such frightful things. Father won't be coming for half an hour yet. And after the way you went on, I am so nervous. How my heart goes pit a pat! You brave men cannot understand such things."

At this moving appeal, Mr. Jakes returned, and endeavoured to allay her terrors.

"It is all about those dreadful men," she said; "I cannot sleep at night for thinking of them. You know all about them. If you could only tell me what you are doing to catch them. They say that you have found out where they went, and are going to put them in jail next week. Is it true? People do tell such stories. But you found it all out by yourself, and you know all the rights of it."

With a little more coaxing, and trembling, and gasping, she contrived to get out of him all that he knew, concerning the matter to the present time. Crang had identified the impressions as the footmarks of the disabled horse; and a search of the cave by torchlight showed that it must have been occupied lately. A large button with a raised rim, such as are used on sailor's overalls, had been found near the entrance, and inside were prints of an enormous boot, too big for any man in Perlycross. Also the search had been carried

further, and the tracks of a horse and a narrow-wheeled cart could be made out here and there, until a rough flinty lane was come to, leading over the moors to the Honiton road. All these things were known to Dr. Fox, and most of them to Mr. Penniloe, who had just returned from London, and the matter was now in skilful hands. But everything must be kept very quiet, or the chance of pursuing the clue might be lost.

Tamar vowed solemnly that she would never tell a word; and away went the Sergeant, well pleased with himself, as the bells began to ring for the afternoon service.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD MILL.

Combing up on the South like a great tidal wave. Hagdon Hill for miles looks down on the beautiful valley of the Perle, and then at the western end breaks down into steep declivities and wooded slopes. Here the Susscot brook has its sources on the southern side of the long gaunt range, outside the parish of Perlycross; and gathering strength at every stretch from flinty trough, and mossy runnel, is big enough to trundle an old mill-wheel, a long while before it gets to Joe Crang's forge.

This mill is situated very sweetly for those who love to be outside the world. It stands at the head of a winding hollow fringed along the crest with golden gorse, wild roses by the thousand, and the silvery gleam of birch. Up this pretty "goyal"—as they call it—there is a fine view of the ancient mill, lonely, decrepit, and melancholy, with the flints dropping out of

its scarred wall-face, the tattered thatch rasping against the wind, and the big wheel dribbling idly; for the wooden carrier, that used to keep it splashing and spinning merrily, sprawls away on its trestles, itself a wreck, broken-backed and bulging.

And yet in its time this mill has done well, and pounded the corn of a hundred farms; for, strange as it may be, the Perle itself is exceedingly shy of mill-work, being broken upon no wheel save those of the staring and white-washed factory which disfigures the village of Perlycross. Therefore from many miles around came cart, and butt, and van, and wain, to this out-of-the-way and hard to find, but flourishing and useful Tremlett mill. That its glory has departed and its threshold is deserted, came to pass through no fault of wheel, or water, or even wanton trade seduced by younger rivals. Man alone was to blame, and he could not—seldom incapable as he is of that—even put the fault on woman.

The Tremletts were of very ancient race, said to be of Norman origin, and this mill had been theirs for generations. Thrifty, respectable, and hard-working, they had worn out many millstones—one of which had been set up in the churchyard, an honour to itself

and owner—and patched up a lot of ages of mill-wheels (the only useful revolution) until there came into the small human sluice a thread of vile weed, that clogged everything up. A vein of bad blood that tainted all, varicose, sluggish, intractable.

What man can explain such things, even to his own satisfaction? Yet everybody knows that it is so, and too often with the people who have been in front of him. Down went the Tremletts for a hundred years—quite a trifle to such an old family—and the wheel ceased to turn, and the hearth had nought to burn, and the brook took to running in a low perverted course.

But even sad things may be beautiful—like the grandest of all human tragedies,—and here before Mr. Penniloe's new long-sighted glasses, which already had a fine effect upon his mind, was a prospect, worth all the three sovereigns he had paid, in addition to the three he had lived under. No monarch of the world—let alone this little isle—could have gilded and silvered and pearled and jewelled his most sumptuous palace, and his chambers of delight, with a tithe of the beauty here set forth by nature, whose adornments come and go, at every breath.

For there had just been another heavy fall of snow, and the frost having firm hold of the air, the sun had no more power than a great white star, glistening rather than shining, and doubtful of his own domain in the multitude of sparkles. Everything that stood across the light was clad with dazzling raiment; branch, and twig, and reed, and ozier, pillowed with lace of snow above, and fringed with chenille of rime below. Under and through this arcade of radiance, stood the old mill-wheel—for now it could stand—black, and massive, and leaning on pellucid pillars of glistering ice.

Mr. Penniloe lifted up his heart to God, as he always did at any of His glorious works; and then he proceeded to his own less brilliant, but equally chilling duty. Several times he knocked vainly at the rickety door of the remaining room, until at last a harsh voice cried—"Come in, can't 'e? Nort for 'e to steal here."

Then he pulled the leather thong, an old boot-lace, and the grimy wooden latch clicked up, and the big door staggered inwards. Everything looked cold and weist and haggard in the long low room he entered, and hunger-stricken, though of solid fabric once, and even now tolerably free from dirt. At the further

end, and in a gloomy recess, was a large low bedstead of ancient oak, carved very boldly and with finely flowing lines. Upon it lay a very aged woman, of large frame and determined face, wearing a high yellow cap, and propped by three coarse pillows, upon which fell the folds of a French shawl of rich material.

She had thick eyebrows, still as black as a coal, and fierce gray eyes with some fire in them still, and a hooked nose that almost overhung a pointed chin; and her long bony arms lay quivering upon a quilt of well-worn patchwork. She looked at Mr. Penniloe, discerning him clearly without the aid of spectacles, and saluted him with a slight disdainful nod.

"Oh, Passon is it? Well, what have 'e got to say to me?" Her voice was hard, and pitched rather high, and her gaunt jaws worked with a roll of wrinkles, intended for a playful grin.

"Mrs. Tremlett, I was told that you wished to see me, and that it is a solemn moment with you—that soon you will stand in the presence of a merciful but righteous Judge."

Mr. Penniloe approached her with a kind and gentle look, and offered to take one of

her clenched and withered hands, but she turned the knuckles to him with a sudden twist, and so sharp were they that they almost cut his palm. He drew back a little, and a flash of spiteful triumph told him that she had meant this rasper for him.

"Bain't a gwäin' to die yet," she said; "I be only ninety-one, and my own moother wor ninety-five afore her lost a tooth. I reckon I shall see 'e out yet, Master Passon; for 'e don't look very brave—no that 'e don't. Wants a little drap out o' my bottle, I conzider."

The clergyman feared that there was little to be done; but he never let the Devil get the best of him, and he betook himself to one of his most trustworthy resources.

"Mrs. Tremlett, I will with your permission offer a few simple words of prayer, not only for you but for myself, my friend. You can repeat the words after me, if you feel disposed."

"Stop!" she cried, "stop!" and threw out both hands with great vigour, as he prepared to kneel. "Why, you han't gi'en me the zhillin' yet. You always gives Betty Cork a zhillin', afore 'e begins to pray to her. Bain't my soul worth every varden of what Betty Cork's be?"

The Parson was distressed at this inverted view of the value of his ministrations. Nevertheless he pulled out the shilling, which she clapped with great promptitude under her pillow, and then turned her back upon him.

"Goo on now, Passon, as long as ever 'e wull; but not too much noise like, case I might drop off to sleep."

Her attitude was not too favourable; but the Curate had met with many cases quite as bad, and he never allowed himself to be discouraged. And something perhaps in his simple words, or the powers of his patient humility, gave a better and a softer turn to the old woman's moody mind.

"Passon, be you a *h*onest man?" she enquired, when he had risen, affording that adjective a special roughness, according to the manner of Devon. "B'lieve 'e be a good man. But be 'e *h*onest?"

"My goodness, as you call it, would be very small indeed, unless I were honest, Mrs. Tremlett. Without honesty, all is hypocrisy."

"And you bain't no hypocrite; though 'e may be a vule. Most fine scholards is big vules, and half-scholards always maketh start for rogues. But I'll trust 'e, Passon; and the Lord will strike 'e dead, being in his

white sleeves, every Zunday, if 'e goo again the truth. What do 'e say to that, Passon Penniloe? What do 'e think now of that there? And thee praying for me, as if I hadn't got ne'er a coffin's worth!"

The old lady pulled out a canvas bag, and jingled it against Mr. Penniloe's gray locks. Strong vitality was in her face. How could she die, with all that to live for?

"Vifty-two guineas of Jarge the Zecond. T'other come to the throne afore I did it; but his head wasn't out much, and they might goo back of his 'en. So I took 'un of the man as come afore, and there they has been ever since—three score years, and ten, and two. The Lord knoweth, if He reckon'th up the sparrows, what a fine young woman I were then. There bain't such a one in all the County now. Six foot high, twenty inch across the shoulders, and as straight as a hazel wand sucker'd from the root. Have mercy on you, Passon! Your wife, as used to come to see me, was a very purty woman. But in the time of my delight, I could a' taken her with one hand, and done—well, chucked her over Horse-shoe."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Penniloe asked, and his quiet eyes bore down the

boastful gaze, and altered the tone of the old virago.

"Nort, sir, nort. It bain't no use to worrit me. Her tumbled off the clift, and her bruk her purty nack. Her was spying too much after coney's holes, I reckon. But her always waz that tender-hearted. You bain't fit to hold a can'le to her, with all your precious prayers and litanies. But I'll trust 'e, Passon, for her zake. Vetch thiccy old book out o' cubbert."

In the cupboard near the fireplace he found an ancient Bible, bound in black leather, and fortified with silver clasps and corners.

"Hold that there book in your right hand, and this here bag in t'other;" the old lady still clave to the bag, as if far more precious than the Bible—"and then you say slowly after me, same as I was to do the prayers, 'I, Passon Penniloe, of Perlycross, Christian Minister, do hereby make oath and swear that I will do with this bag of money as Zipporah Tremlett telleth me, so help me God Almighty.'"

"Stop, if you please. I will make no such promise, until I know all about it;" objected Mr. Penniloe, while she glared at him with rising anger, and then nodded as something occurred to her.

"Well, then, I'll tell 'e fust; and no call for prabbles. This money bain't none o' they Tremletts; every varden of theirs is gone long ago, although they had ten times so much as this, even while I can mind of 'un. All this, except for a bit of a sto'un in the lower cornder, and that hath been hunderds of years with the Tremletts, but all the rest cometh from my own father, and none on 'em knoweth a word of it. Wouldn't believe if they did, I reckon. Zippy, that's my grand-darter as minds me, her hath orders to hurn for her life and vetch you—night or day, mind,—fust moment the breath be gone out of my body. And every varden of it is for she. You be to take it from this here little nestie, wi'out a word to no one, and keep it zealed up under lock and key, till Zippy be eighteen year of age, and then, accordin' to your oath, you putt it into her two hands. If 'e do that, Passon, I'll die a Christian, and you be welcome of me to your churchyard. But if 'e wun't do it, then I'll die a hathen, and never go to no churchyard, same as scores and scores of the Tremletts is. Now, do 'e care for the soul of an old 'ooman? Or would 'e soonder her went to the Devil?"

By this alternative the Curate felt much

pressure put upon his conscience. If there were no other way to save her, he must even dispense with legal form, and accept a trust, which might (for all he knew) defraud the Revenue of legacy duty, and even some honest solicitor of a contribution to his livelihood. But first he must be certain that the scheme was just and rational.

"No fear of robbing nobody. They Tremletts be a shocking lot," she said, with amiable candour. "Just slip the wedge on top of latch, for fear one on 'em should come to see if I be dead; though I reckon, this weather, it would be too much for either son or darter. Wouldn't 'em hurn, if 'em knowed of this? But here I may lie and be worm-eaten. And chillers of my own—my own buys and girls. Dree quarters of a score I've had, and not one on 'em come anigh me! Never was a harrier-bird could fly so fast as every one on 'em would, to this old bed, if 'em knowed what be in it. No. I be a liar—every one on 'em can't, because the biggest half be gone. Twelve buys there was, and dree wenches of no count. Dree buys was hanged, back in time of Jarge the Third, to Exeter jail, for ship-staling, and one to Gibbet-moor, for what a' did upon the road. Vour on 'em was sent over seas, for

running a few bits of goods from France. Two on 'em be working to Whetstone pits, 'cording to their own account, though I reckon they does another sort of job, now and again. And as for t'other two, the Lord, or the Devil, knoweth what be come to they. Not one on 'em comes nigh poor old moother, who might a' died years ago 'cep for little Zippy. Though little Zip's father have a' been here now and then. The biggest and the wildest of the dozen I call him, though a' kapeth wonderful out of jail. 'Tis his cheel he comes to see, not his poor old moother. Look 'e ere, Passon, all the ins and outs of 'un be set down rarely in that there book; same as the game with lines and crosses we used to play with a oyster-shell, fourscore years agone and more."

On three or four leaves of the ancient Bible, bound in for that purpose, was a pedigree of these Tremletts of the Mill, descending from the fourteenth century. Mr. Penniloe looked at it with no small interest. What a pity to find them come to this! The mill itself had been a fall no doubt; but the Whetstone pits were a great descent from that.

"Tremletts has always had one or two fine scholards"—the old woman had a strange theory about this. "'Twor all along o' that

they come down so. Whenever any man taketh much to books, a' stoppeth up his ears to good advice, and a' heedeth of his headpiece, and robbeth of 's own belly. But there, no matter. I can do a bit myself. Have 'e made up your mind about my poor soul?"

From the toss of her nose, Mr. Penniloe was afraid that she was not much in earnest about that little matter. And in common sense, he was loth to get entangled with the nettles and briars of such a queer lot.

"I think, Mrs. Tremlett," he said, with a smile containing some light of wavering, "that your wisest plan by far would be to have a short will drawn up, and leave the money——"

"Gi'e me my bag, and go thy ways," she screamed in a fury, though the bag was in her claws. "No churchyard for me, and my soul at thy door, thou white-livered, black-smocked Passon!"

Her passion struck into her lungs or throat, and she tore at her scraggy chest, to ease the pain and gripe of a violent coughing-fit. Mr. Penniloe supported her massive head, for if it fell back, it might never rise again.

"A drap out o' bottle!" she gasped at last, pointing to the cupboard where the Bible had been. He propped up her head with a pillow

on end, and took from the cupboard a long-necked bottle of the best French brandy, and a metal pannikin.

"No watter! No watter!" the old woman shrieked, as he went towards a pitcher that stood by the chimney. "Watter spileth all. No vear! Vill up!"

He gave her the pannikin full, and she tipped it off, like a mouthful of milk, and then sat up, and looked at him steadily.

"I be no drunkard," she said, "though a man as knoweth nort might vancy it. Never touches that stuff, excep' for physic. I've a' seed too much what comes of that. Have a drap, wull 'e? Clane glass over yanner."

She seemed annoyed again at his refusal, but presently subsided into a milder vein, as if she were soothed by the mighty draught, instead of becoming excited.

"Naden't have troubled 'e, Passon," she said, "but for zending of little Zip away. I'll tell 'e why, now just. Better cheel never lived than little Zip. Her tendeth old grannie night and day, though her getteth a tap on the head now and then. But her mustn't know of this here money, or her father 'd have it out of her in two zeconds. Now 'e see why I won't make no will. Now, will 'e do what I axed of 'e?"

After some hesitation, the Parson gave his promise. He had heard from his wife about poor little Zip, and how faithful she was to her old grandmother; and he felt that it would be unfair to the child to deprive her of the chance in life this money might procure; while he knew that if he declined the trust, not a penny would she ever see of it. He insisted however upon one precaution—that the owner should sign a memorandum of the gift, and place it with the guineas in the bag, and then hand the whole to him as trustee, completing by delivery the *donatio mortis causâ*. In spite of her sufferings from the ruinous effects of the higher education, Zipporah could sign her name very fairly, and a leaf of her grandchild's copybook served very well for the memorial prepared by Mr. Penniloe.

"Now rouse up the fire there, 'e must be frore a'most." Mrs. Tremlett said when that was finished, and she had shown him where she concealed the treasure. "'One good toorn desarves another,' as I've heerd say, though never had much chance of proving it; and I could tell 'e a thing or two, 'e might be glad to know, Passon Penniloe, wi'out doing harm to nobody. Fust place then, you mind hearing of the man as gi'ed that doiled zany of a black-

smith such a turn—how long agone waz it? I can't say justly; but the night after Squire Waldron's vuneral."

"To be sure. The big man with the lame horse, at Susscot ford."

"Well, that man waz my son Harvey, little Zip's father. You see the name in big Bible. French name it waz then, spelled different, and with a stroke to the tail, as maight be. Tremletts had a hankering after foreign languages. See 'un all down the page you can."

"What, Mrs. Tremlett!" exclaimed the Parson. "Are you aware what you are doing? Informing against your own son—and one of the very few remaining!"

"Zober now, zober! Don't 'e be a vule, Passon. I knows well enough what I be adoing of. Just I wants 'un out of way, till arter I be buried like. I zent his little darter to the pits to-day, to tell 'un as how you knowed of it. That'll mak 'un cut sticks, till I be underground, I reckon."

As the old woman grinned and nodded at her own sagacity, a horrible idea crossed the mind of Mr. Penniloe. Could she be afraid that her own son would dig up her body, and dispose of it?

Before he had condemned himself for such

a vile suspicion, Mrs. Tremlett seemed to have read his thoughts; for she smiled with bitter glory, as if she had caught a pious man yielding to impiety.

"No, Harvey bain't no body-snatcher—leastways not as I ever heer'd on; though most volk would say a' was bad enough for anything. All that I wants 'un out of way for, is that he mayn't have the chance to rob his darter. He loveth of the little maid, so much as Old Nick 'loweth him. But he could never kape his hands out of this here bag, if a' zeed 'un. And as for your folk doin' any hurt to 'un, 'twould be more use for 'e to drive nails into a shadow, than to lay hold of Harvey when he knoweth you be arter 'un. And even if 'e wor to vind 'un, man alive, it would be a bad job for you, or for zix such men as you be, to come nigh the hands of Harvey Tremlett. Volk about these parts don't know nort of 'un, else they'd have had 'un for the 'rastling long ago. He hath been about a good deal among the Gipsies, and sailor-folk, and so on; and the Lord knows He musn't look for too very much of good in 'un."

"We must make allowances, Mrs. Tremlett. We never do justice to our fellow-men, in that way." Mr. Penniloe was saying to himself,

while he spoke—"and a great deal must be allowed for such bringing-up as yours, ma'am." "But have you anything more to tell me, about that shocking thing, that is such a sad disgrace to Perlycross?" The Parson buttoned up his Spencer, as if he still felt that dirty Pack's hits below the belt.

"I could tell e' a saight of things, if I waz so minded, about what they vules to Perlycross, and you among t'others be mazed about. I can't make 'un out myself; but I be free to swear you'm a passel of idiots. Tremletts was bad enough; no vamley could be worse a'most; and much older they was than any Waldrons. But none on 'em never was dug up for generations. Won'erful things has come to them—things as would fill books bigger than this Bible; because 'em always wor above the lids of the ten Commandments. But 'em always had peace, so soon as they was dead, till such time as the Devil could come for 'un, and he don't care for no corpses. They Waldrons is tame—no French blood in 'em. Vitted for big pews in church, and big vunerals. Vellers not laikely to be dug up, when that waz never done to Tremletts. Passon, I could tell 'e such a saight of things, as would make the hair creep round the head of thee. Can't talk no more, or my

cough will come on. Will tell 'e all about your little boy, Mike; if 'e come again when this vrost is over. And then I'll show 'e Zip. But I can't talk vair, while the houze be so cold. I've a dooed too much to-day, for a 'ooman in her ninety-zecond year. You come again about this day wake. I trust 'e now, Passon. You be a good man, because you'm got no good blood in you. A old 'ooman's blessing won't do 'e no harm."

Vast is the power of a good kind face, and of silence at the proper moment. The Curate of Perlycross possessed that large and tender nature, at which the weak are apt to scoff, because they are not afraid of it. Over them no influence can last, for there is nothing to lay hold of. But a strong-willed person, like that old woman, has substance that can be dealt with, if handled kindly and without pretence. Thus Mr. Penniloe indulged some hope of soothing and softening that fierce and flinty nature, and guiding it towards that peace on earth, which is the surest token of the amnesty above.

But while he was at breakfast on the following day, he was told that a little maid was at the front door, crying very bitterly, and refusing to come in. He went out alone, but

not a syllable would she utter, until he had closed the door behind him. There she stood, shivering in the snow, and sobbing, very poorly dressed, and with nothing on her head, but mopping her eyes and nose, as she turned away, with a handkerchief of the finest lace.

"Zip," was all the answer Mr. Penniloe could get to his gentle enquiry as to who she was; and then she looked at him with large and lustrous eyes, beautifully fringed below as well as above, and announcing very clearly that she was discussing him within. Although he guessed what her errand was, the clergyman could not help smiling at her earnest and undisguised probation of his character; and that smile settled the issue in his favour.

"You be to coom to wance;" her vowel-sounds were of the purest Devonshire air, winged by many a quill, but never summed in pen by any; "Wi'out no stapping to think, you be to coom!"

"What an imperious little Zenobia!" said Mr. Penniloe, in self-commune.

"Dunno, whatt thiccy be. Grandmoother zayeth, 'e must coom to wance. But her be dead, zince the can'le gooed out." Her eyes burst into another flood, and she gave up the job of sopping it.

"My dear, I will come with you, in half a minute. Come and stand in the warmth, till I am ready."

"Noo. Noo. I bain't to stop. Putt on hat, and coom raight awai. Vire gooed out, and can'le gooed out, and Grannie gooed out, along wi' 'un."

Mr. Penniloe huddled his Spencer on, while the staring child danced with impatience in the snow; and quiet little Fay came and glanced at her, and wondered how such things could be. But Fay would not stare, because she was a little lady.

The clergyman was very quick of foot; but the child with her long Tremlett legs kept easily in front of him all the way, with the cloud of her black hair blowing out, on the frosty air, to hurry him.

"I bain't aveared of her. Be you?" said the little maid, as she rose on tip-toe, to pull the thong of the heavy latch. "If her coom back, her would zay—'Good cheel, Zippy!'"

CHAPTER IX.

PANIC.

Christmas Day fell on a Friday that year, and the funeral of that ancient woman took place on the previous afternoon. The Curate had never read the burial-service, before so small an audience. For the weather was bitterly cold, and poor Mrs. Tremlett had outlived all her friends, if she ever had any; no one expected a farthing from her, and no one cared to come and shudder at her grave. Of all her many descendants none, except the child Zip, was present; and she would have stood alone upon the frozen bank, unless Mrs. Muggridge had very kindly offered to come and hold the shivering and streaming little hand.

What was to be done with Zip? Nobody came forward. There were hundreds of kind people in the parish, and dozens to whom the poor waif would have been a scarcely perceptible burden. Yet nobody cared to have

a Tremlett at his hearth, and everybody saw the duty marked out for his neighbour.

"Then I will take her;" said Mr. Penniloe with his true benevolence, "but the difficulty is where to place her. She cannot well be among my children yet, until I know more about her. And, although the old family is so reduced, the kitchen is scarcely the place for her." However, that question soon answered itself; and though little Zip was at first a sad puzzle (especially to the staid Muggridge), her grateful and loving nature soon began to win a warm hold and a tranquil home for her.

That winter, although it began rather early, was not of prolonged severity, for the frost broke up on Christmas night, at least in the west of England, with a heavy fall of snow which turned to rain. But Christmas Day itself was very bright and pleasant, with bracing air, hard frozen snow, and firm sunshine throwing long shadows on it, and sparkling on the icicles from thatch and spout and window-frame. As the boys of the Sunday school filed out, at the call of the bells in the tower chiming (after long silence while the arch was being cut) and as they formed into grand procession, under the military eye of Jakes, joyfully they watched their cloudy

breath ascending, or blew it in a column on some other fellow's cap. Visions were before them,—a pageantry of joy, a fortnight of holidays, a fortnight of sliding, snow-balling, bone-runners, Cooper Baker's double-hoops, why not even skates?

But alas, even now the wind was backing, as the four vanes with rare unanimity proclaimed, a white fog (that even a boy could stand out of) was stealing up the valley, while the violet tone of the too transparent sky, and the whiteness of the sun (which used to be a dummy fireball), and even the short sharp clack of the bells, were enough to tell any boy with weather eyes and ears, that the nails on his heels would do no cobbler's click again, till the holiday time was over.

But blessed are they who have no prophetic gift, be it of the weather, or of things yet more unstable. All went to church in a happy frame of mind; and the Parson in a like mood looked upon them. Every head was there that he had any right to count, covered or uncovered. Of the latter perhaps more than a Sunday would produce; of the former not so many, but to a Christian mind enough; for how shall a great church-festival be kept without a cook? But the ladies who were

there were in very choice attire, happy in having nothing but themselves to dress; all in good smiling condition, and reserving for home use their candid reviews of one another.

There was the genial and lively Mrs. Farrant, whose good word and good sayings everybody valued; close at her side was her daughter Minnie, provided by nature with seasonable gifts—lips more bright than the holly-berry, teeth more pearly than mistletoe, cheeks that proved the hardiness of the rose in Devon, and eyes that anticipated Easter-tide with the soft glance of the Forget-me-not. Then there was Mrs. John Horner, *interdum aspera cornu*, but *fœnum habens* for the roast-beef time; and kind Mrs. Anning (quite quit of this tale, though the Perle runs through her orchard), and tall Mrs. Webber with two pretty girls—all purely distinct from the lawyer—and Mrs. James Hollyer, and Mrs. John Hollyer, both great in hospitality; and others of equally worthy order, for whom the kind hearts of Bright and Cobden would have ached, had they not been blind seers.

To return to our own sheep, themselves astray, there was no denying Mrs. Gilham, looking still a Christian, up a fathom of sea-green bonnet; and her daughter Rose, now so

demure if ever she caught a wandering eye, that it had to come again to beg pardon; and by her side a young man stood, with no eyes at all for the prettiest girl inside the sacred building!

But strange as it may seem, he had eyes enough and to spare, for a young man opposite; whose face he perused with perpetual enquiry, which the other understood, but did not want to apprehend. For instance, "How is your very darling sister? Have you heard from her by the latest post? Did she say anything about me? When is she coming to Perlycross again? Do you think she is reading the same Psalm that we are? Have they got any Christmas parties on? I hope there is no mistletoe up that way, or at any rate no hateful fellow near her with it?"

These, and fifty other points of private worship, not to be discovered in the Book of Common Prayer—even by the cleverest anagram of Ritualist—did Frank Gilham vainly strive to moot with Jemmy Fox across the aisle, instead of being absorbed and rapt in the joyful tidings of the day.

Neither was Jemmy Fox a ha'porth more devout. With the innate selfishness of all young men, he had quite another dish of fish

to fry for his own plate. As for Frank Gilham's, he would upset it joyfully, in spite of all sympathy or gratitude. And, if so low a metaphor can ever be forgiven, Jemmy's fish, though not in sight but in a brambly corner, was fairly hooked and might be felt; whereas Frank Gilham's, if she had ever seen his fly, had (so far as he could be sure) never even opened mouth to take it; but had sailed away upstream, leaving a long furrow, as if—like the celebrated trout in Crocker's Hole—she scorned any tackle a poor farmer could afford.

Fox, on the other hand, had reasonable hopes, that patience and discretion and the flowing stream of time, would bring his lovely prize to bank at last. For the chief thing still against him was that black and wicked charge; and even now he looked at all the women in the church, with very little interest in their features, but keen enquiry as to their expression. His eyes put the question to them, one after another,—"My good madam, are you still afraid of me?" And sad to say, the answer from too many of them was—"Well, I had rather not shake hands with you, till you have cleared your reputation." So certain is it that if once a woman has believed a thing—be it good, or be it evil—nothing but the evidence

of her own eyes will uproot that belief; and sometimes not even that.

Especially now with Lady Waldron, Fox felt certain that his case stood thus; that in spite of all the arguments of Christie and of Inez, he was not yet acquitted, though less stubbornly condemned; and as long as that state of things lasted, he could not (with proper self-respect) press his suit upon the daughter. For it should be observed that he had no doubt yet of the genuine strength of her ladyship's suspicions. Mr. Penniloe had not thought it right or decent, placed as he was towards the family, to impart to young Jemmy Sir Harrison Gowler's hateful (because misogynic) conclusions.

That excellent preacher, and noble exemplar, the Reverend Philip Penniloe, gave out his text in a fine sonorous voice, echoing through the great pillars of his heart, three words—as many as can ever rouse an echo—and all of them short,—"On earth, peace."

He was gazing on his flock with large good will, and that desire to see the best side of them which is creditable to both parties; for take them altogether they were a peaceful flock —when a crack, as of thunder and lightning all in one, rang in every ear, and made a stop

in every heart. Before any body could start up to ask about it, a cavernous rumble rolled into a quick rattle; and then deep silence followed.

Nervous folk started up, slower persons stared about, even the coolest and most self-possessed doubted their arrangements for the Day of Judgment. The sunlight was shining through the south aisle windows, and none could put the blame on any storm outside.

Then panic arose, as at a trumpet-call. People huddled anyhow, to rush out of their pews, without even sense enough to turn the button-latch. Bald heads were plunging into long-ribboned bonnets, fathers forgot their children, young men their sweethearts, but mothers pushed their little ones before them. "Fly for dear life"—was the impulse of the men; "save the life dearer than my own"—was of the women. That is the moment to be sure what love is.

"Sit still boys, or I'll skin you"—Sergeant Jakes' voice was heard above the uproar; many believed that the roof was falling in; every kind of shriek and scream abounded.

"My friends," said Mr. Penniloe in a loud clear voice, and lifting up his Bible calmly, "remember in Whose house, and in Whose

hands we are. It is but a fall of something in the chancel. It cannot hurt you. Perhaps some brave man will go behind the screen, and just tell us what has happened. I would go myself, if I could leave the pulpit."

People were ashamed, when they saw little Fay run from her seat to the newly-finished steps, and begin groping at the canvas, while she smiled up at her father. In a moment three men drew her back, and passed in. They were Jemmy Fox, Frank Gilham, and the gallant Jakes; and a cloud of dust floated out as they vanished. Courage returned, and the rush and crush were stayed, while Horner and Farrant, the two churchwardens, came with long strides to join the explorers.

Deep silence reigned when Doctor Fox returned, and at the request of Farmer John, addressed the Parson so that all could hear. "There is no danger, sir, of any further fall. There has been a sort of settlement of the south-east corner. The stone screen is cracked, and one end of it has dropped, and the small lancet window has tumbled in. All is now quite firm again. There is not the smallest cause for fear."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Penniloe, "and thank you my friends, for telling us. And

now, as soon as order is quite restored, I shall beg to return to the discussion of my text, which with your permission I will read again."

As soon as he had finished a very brief discourse, worthy of more attention than it could well secure, his flock hurried gladly away, with much praise of his courage and presence of mind, but no thought of the heavy loss and sad blow cast upon him. Fox alone remained behind, to offer aid and sympathy, when the Parson laid his gown aside and came to learn the worst of it. They found that the south-east corner of the chancel-wall, with the external quoin and two buttresses, had parted from the rest, and sunk bodily to the depth of a yard or more, bearing away a small southern window, a portion of the roof and several panels of that equally beautiful and unlucky screen.

At a rough guess, at least another hundred pounds would be required to make good the damage. It was not only this, but the sense of mishaps so frequent and unaccountable –few of which have been even mentioned here –that now began to cast heavy weight and shadow, upon the cheerful heart of Penniloe. For it seemed as if all things combined against him, both as regarded the work itself, and the means

by which alone it could be carried on. And this last disaster was the more depressing, because no cause whatever could be found for it. That wall had not been meddled with in any way externally, because it seemed quite substantial. And even inside there had been but little done to it, simply a shallow excavation made, for the plinth, or footings, of the newly erected screen.

"Never mind, sir," said Fox; "it can soon be put to rights; and your beautiful screen will look ever so much better without that lancet window, which has always appeared to me quite out of place."

"Perhaps," replied the Parson, in a sad low voice, and with a shake of his head which meant—"all very fine; but how on earth am I to get the money?"

Even now the disaster was not complete. Subscriptions had grown slack, and some had even been withdrawn, on the niggardly plea that no church was worth preserving, which could not protect even its own dead. And now the news of this occurrence made that matter worse again, for the blame of course fell upon Penniloe. "What use to help a man, who cannot help himself?" "A fellow shouldn't meddle with bricks and mortar, unless he was

brought up to them." "I like him too well, to give him another penny. If I did he'd pull the tower down upon his own head." Thus and thus spoke they who should have flown to the rescue; some even friendly enough to deal the coward's blow at the unfortunate.

Moreover, that very night the frost broke up, with a fall of ten inches of watery snow, on the wet back of which came more than half an inch of rain, the total fall being two inches and three quarters. The ground was too hard to suck any of it in; water by the acre lay on streaky fields of ground-ice; every gateway poured its runnel, and every flinty lane its torrent. The Perle became a roaring flood, half a mile wide in the marshes; and the Susscot brook dashed away the old mill-wheel, and whirled some of it down as far as Joe Crang's anvil, fulfilling thereby an old prophecy. Nobody could get—without swimming horse or self—from Perlycombe to Perlycross, or from Perlycross to Perliton; and old mother Pods was drowned in her own cottage. The view of the valley, from either Beacon Hill or Hagdon, was really grand for any one tall enough to wade so far up the weltering ways. Old Channing vowed that he had never seen such a flood, and feared that the big bridge would

be washed away; but now was seen the value of the many wide arches, which had puzzled Christie Fox in the distance. Alas for the Hopper, that he was so far away at this noble time for a cross-country run! But he told Pike afterwards, and Mrs. Muggridge too, that he had a good time of it, even in the Mendips.

In this state of things, the condition of the chancel, with the shattered roof yawning to the reek of the snow-slides, and a Southern gale hurling floods in at the wall-gaps, may better be imagined than described, as a swimming rat perhaps reported to his sodden family. And people had a fine view of it at the Sunday service, for the canvas curtain had failed to resist the swag and the bellying of the blast, and had fallen in a squashy pile, and formed a rough breakwater for the mortary lake behind it.

There was nothing to be done for the present except to provide against further mischief. The masons from Exeter had left work, by reason of the frost, some time ago; but under the directions of Mr. Richard Horner the quoin was shored up, and the roof and window made waterproof with tarpaulins. So it must remain till Easter now; when the time of year, and possibly a better tide of money, might enable

beaten Christians to put shoulder to the hod again. Meanwhile was there any chance of finding any right for the wrong, which put every man who looked forward to his grave out of all conceit with Perlycross?

"Vaither, do 'e care to plaze your luving darter, as 'e used to doo? Or be 'e changed, and not the zame to her?"

"The vurry za-am. The vurry za-am," Mr. Penniloe answered, with his eyes glad to rest on her, yet compelled by his conscience to correct her vowel sounds. It had long been understood between them, that Fay might forsake upon occasion what we now call "higher culture," and try her lissome tongue at the soft Ionic sounds, which those who know nothing of the West call *Doric*.

"Then vaither," cried the child, rising to the situation; "whatt vor do 'e putt both han's avore the eyes of 'e? The Lard in heaven can zee 'e, arl the zaam."

The little girl was kneeling with both elbows on a chair, and her chin set up steadfastly between her dimpled hands, while her clear eyes, gleaming with the tears she was repressing, dwelt upon her father's downcast face.

"My darling, my own darling, you are the image of your mother," Mr. Penniloe exclaimed,

as he rose, and caught her up. "What is the mammon of this world to heaven's angels?"

After that his proper course would have been to smoke a pipe, if that form of thank-offering had been duly recommended by the rising school of Churchmen. His omission however was soon repaired; for, before he could even relapse towards "the blues," the voice of a genuine smoker was heard, and the step of a man of substance, the time being now the afternoon of Monday.

"Halloa, Penniloe!" this gentleman exclaimed; "How are you, this frightful weather? Very glad to see you. Made a virtue of necessity; can't have the hounds out, and so look up my flock. Never saw the waters out so much in all my life. *Nancy* had to swim at Susscot ford. Thought we should have been washed down, but Crang threw us a rope. Says nobody could cross yesterday. *Nancy* must have a hot wash, please Mrs. Muggridge. I'll come and see to it, if you'll have the water hot. Harry's looking after her till I come back. Like to see a boy that takes kindly to a horse. What a job I had to get your back-gate open! Never use your stable-yard, it seems. Beats me, how any man can live without a horse! Well, my dear fellow, I hope the world only

deals with you, according to your merits. Bless my heart, why, that can never be Fay! What a little beauty! Got a kiss to spare, my dear? Don't be afraid of me. Children always love me. Got one little girl just your height. Won't I make her jealous, when I get home? Got something in my vady, that will make your pretty eyes flash. Come, come, Penniloe, this won't do. You don't look at all the thing. Want a thirty mile ride, and a drop of brown mahogany—put a little colour into your learned face. Just you should have a look at my son, Jack. Mean him for this little puss, if ever he grows good enough. Not a bad fellow though. And how's your little Mike? Why there he is, peeping round the corner! I'll have it out with him, when I've had some dinner. Done yours, I daresay? Anything will do for me. A rasher of bacon, and a couple of poached eggs is a dinner for a lord, I say. You don't eat enough, that's quite certain. Saw an awful thing in the papers last week. Parsons are going to introduce fasting! Protestant parsons, mind you! Can't believe it. Shall have to join the Church of Rome, if they do. All jolly fellows there—never saw a lean one. I suppose I am about the last man you expected to turn up. Glad to

see you though, upon my soul! You don't like that expression—ha, how well I know your face! Strictly clerical I call it though; or at any rate, professional. But bless my heart alive—if you like that better—what has all our parish been about? Why a dead man belongs to the parson, not the doctor. The doctors have done for him, and they ought to have done with him. But we parsons never back one another up. Not enough colour in the cloth, I always say. Getting too much of black, and all black."

The Rev. John Chevithorne, Rector of the parish, was doing his best at the present moment to relieve "the cloth" of that imputation. For his coat was dark green, and his waistcoat of red shawl-stuff, and his breeches of buff corduroy, while his boots—heavy jack-boots coming half-way up the thigh—might have been of any colour under the sun, without the sun knowing what the colour was, so spattered, and plastered, and cobbed with mud were they. And throughout all his talk, he renewed the hand-shakes, in true pump-handle fashion, at short intervals, for he was strongly attached to his Curate. They had been at the same College, and on the same staircase; and although of different standing and very different

characters, had taken to one another with a liking which had increased as years went on. Mr. Penniloe had an Englishman's love of field-sports; and though he had repressed it from devotion to his calling, he was too good a Christian to condemn those who did otherwise.

"Chevithorne, I have wanted you most sadly," he said, as soon as his guest was reclad from his vady, and had done ample justice to rashers and eggs; "I am really ashamed of it, but fear greatly that I shall have to be down upon you again. Children, you may go, and get a good run before dark. Things have been going on—in fact the Lord has not seemed to prosper this work at all."

"If you are going to pour forth a cloud of sorrows, you won't mind my blowing one of comfort."

The Rector was a pleasant man to look at, and a pleasant one to deal with, if he liked his customer. But a much sharper man of the world than his Curate; prompt, resolute, and penetrating, short in his manner, and when at all excited, apt to indulge himself in the language of the laity.

"Well," he said, after listening to the whole Church history, "I am not a rich man, as you

know, my friend. People suppose that a man with three livings must be rolling in money, and all that. They never think twice of the outgoings. And Jack goes to Oxford in January. That means something, as you and I know well. Though he has promised me not to hunt there; and he is a boy who never goes back from his word. But Chancel of course is my special business. Will you let me off for fifty, at any rate for the present? And don't worry yourself about the debt. We'll make it all right among us. Our hunt will come down with another fifty, if I put it before them to the proper tune, when they come back to work, after this infernal muck. Only you mustn't look like this. The world gets worse and worse, every day, and can't spare the best man it contains. You should have seen the rick of hay I bought last week, just because I didn't push my knuckles into it. Thought I could trust my brother Tom's churchwarden. And Tom laughs at me; which digs it in too hard. Had a rise out of him last summer though, and know how to do him again for Easter-offerings. Tom is too sharp, for a man who has got no family. Won't come down with twopence for Jack's time at Oxford. And he has got all the Chevithorne

estates, you know. Nothing but the copyhold came to me. Always the way of the acres, with a man who could put a child to stand on every one of them. However, you never hear me complain. But surely you ought to get more out of those Waldrons. An offering to the Lord *in memoriam*—a proper view of chastisement: have you tried to work it up?"

"I have not been able to take that view of it," Mr. Pemiloe answered, smiling for a moment, though doubtful of the right to do so. "How can I ask them for another farthing, after what has happened? And leaving that aside, I am now in a position in which it would be unbecoming. You may have heard that I am Trustee for a part of the Waldron estates, to secure a certain sum for the daughter, Nicie."

"Then that puts it out of the question," said the Rector; "I know what those trust-plagues are. I call them a tax upon good repute. 'The friendly balm that breaks the head.' I never understood that passage, till in a fool's moment I accepted a Trusteeship. However, go on with that Waldron affair. They are beginning to chaff me about it shamefully, now that their anger and fright are gone by. Poor

as I am, I would give a hundred pounds, for the sake of the parish, to have it all cleared up. But the longer it goes on, the darker it gets. You used to be famous for concise abstracts. Do you remember our Thucydides? Wasn't it old Short that used to put a year of the war on an oyster-shell, and you beat him by putting it on a thumbnail? Give us in ten lines all the theories of the great Perlycrucian mystery. Ready in a moment. I'll jot them down. What's the Greek for Perlycross? Puzzle even you, I think, that would. Number them, one, two, and so on. There must be a dozen by this time."

Mr. Penniloe felt some annoyance at this too jocular view of the subject; but he bore in mind that his Rector was not so sadly bound up with it, as his own life was. So he set down, as offering the shortest form, the names of those who had been charged with the crime, either by the public voice, or by private whisper.

1. Fox.
2. Gronow.
3. Gowler.
4. Some other medical man of those parts—conjecture founded very often upon the last half-year's account.

5. Lady Waldron herself.

6. Some relative of hers, with or without her knowledge.

"Now, I think that exhausts them," the Curate continued; "and I will discuss them in that order. No. 1 is the general opinion still. I mean that of the great majority, outside the parish, and throughout the county. None who knew Jemmy could conceive it, and those who know nothing of him will dismiss it, I suppose, when they hear of his long attachment to Miss Waldron.

"Nos. 2, 3, and 4, may also be dismissed, being founded in each case on personal dislikes, without a *scintilla* of evidence to back it. As regards probability, No. 4 would take the lead; for Gronow, and Gowler, are out of the question. The former has given up practice, and hates it, except for the benefit of his friends. And as for Gowler, he could have no earthly motive. He understood the case as well as if he had seen it; and his whole time is occupied with his vast London practice. But No. 4 also is reduced to the very verge of impossibility. There is no one at Exeter, who would dream of such things. No country practitioner would dare it, even if the spirit of research could move him. And as for Bath, and Bristol, I

have received a letter from Gowler disposing of all possibility there."

"Who suggested No. 5? That seems a strange idea. What on earth should Lady Waldron do it for?"

"Gowler suggested it. I tell you in the strictest confidence, Chevithorne. Of course you will feel that. I have told no one else, and I should not have told you, except that I want your advice about it. You have travelled in Spain. You know much of Spanish people. I reject the theory altogether; though Gowler is most positive, and laughs at my objections. You remember him, of course?"

"I should think so," said the Rector, "a wonderfully clever fellow, but never much liked. Nobody could ever get on with him, but you; and two more totally different men—however, an opinion of his is worth something. What motive could he discover for it?"

"Religious feelings. Narrow, if you like—for we are as Catholic as they are—but very strong, as one could well conceive, if only they suited the character. The idea would be, that the wife, unable to set aside the husband's wishes openly, or unwilling to incur the odium of it, was secretly resolved upon his burial

elsewhere, and with the rites which she considered needful."

"It is a most probable explanation. I wonder that it never occurred to you. Gowler has hit the mark. What a clever fellow! And see how it exculpates the parish! I shall go back, with a great weight off my mind. Upon my soul, Penniloe, I am astonished that you had to go to London, to find out this *a*, *b*, *c*. If I had been over here a little more often, I should have hit upon it, long ago."

"Chevithorne, I think that very likely," the Curate replied, with the mildness of those who let others be rushed off their legs by themselves. "The theory is plausible,—accounts for everything,—fits in with the very last discoveries, proves this parish, and even the English nation, guiltless. Nevertheless, it is utterly wrong; according at least to my view of human nature."

"Your view of human nature was always too benevolent. That was why everybody liked you so. But, my dear fellow, you have lived long enough now, to know that it only does for Christmas-day sermons."

"I have not lived long enough, and hope to do so never," Mr. Penniloe answered very quietly; but with a manner, which the other

understood, of the larger sight looking over hat-crowns. "Will you tell me, Chevithorne, upon what points you rely? And then, I will tell you what I think of them."

"Why, if it comes to argument, what chance have I against you? You can put things, and I can't. But I can sell a horse, and you can buy it—fine self-sacrifice on your side. I go strictly upon common sense. I have heard a lot of that Lady Waldron. I have had some experience of Spanish ladies. Good and bad, no doubt, just as English ladies are. It is perfectly obvious to my mind, that Lady Waldron has done all this."

"To my mind," replied Mr. Penniloe, looking stedfastly at the Rector, "it is equally obvious that she has not."

"Upon what do you go?" asked the Rector, rather warmly, for he prided himself on his knowledge of mankind, though admitting very handsomely his ignorance of books.

"I go upon my faith in womankind." The Curate spoke softly, as if such a thing were new, and truly it was not at all in fashion then. "This woman loved her husband. Her grief was deep and genuine. His wishes were sacred to her. She is quite incapable of double-dealing. And indeed I would say, that if ever

there was a straight-forward simple-hearted woman——"

"If ever, if ever," replied Mr. Chevithorne, with a fine indulgent smile. "But upon the whole, I think well of them. Let us have a game of draughts, my dear fellow, where the Queens jump over all the poor men."

"Kings, we call them here," answered Mr. Penniloe.

CHAPTER X.

VAGABONDS.

Although Mr. Penniloe's anxiety about the growth of Church-debt was thus relieved a little, another of his troubles was by no means lightened through the visit of the Rector. That nasty suspicion, suggested by Gowler, and heartily confirmed by Chevithorne, was a very great discomfort, and even a torment, inasmuch as he had no one to argue it with. He reasoned with himself that even if the lady were a schemer, so heartless as to ruin a young man (who had done her no harm) that she might screen herself, as well as an actress so heaven-gifted as to impose on every one—both of which qualifications he warmly denied—yet there was no motive, so far as he could see, strong enough to lead her into such a crooked course. To the best of his belief, she was far too indifferent upon religious questions; he had never seen, or heard, of a priest at Walders-

court; and although she never came to church with the others of the family, she had allowed her only daughter to be brought up as a Protestant. She certainly did not value our great nation, quite as much as it values itself, and in fact was rather an ardent Spaniard, though herself of mixed race. But it seemed most unlikely, that either religion or patriotism, or both combined, were strong enough to drive her into action contrary to her dead husband's wishes and to her own character, so far as an unprejudiced man could judge it.

There remained the last theory, No. 6, as given above. To the Curate it seemed the more probable one, although surrounded with difficulties. There might be some Spanish relative, or even one of other country, resolute to save the soul of Sir Thomas Waldron, without equal respect for his body; and in that case it was just possible, that the whole thing might have been arranged, and done, without Lady Waldron's knowledge. But if that were so, what meant the visit of the foreigner, who had tried to escape his notice, when he left the coach?

Before Mr. Penniloe could think it out—Jemmy Fox (who might have helped him, by way of Nicie, upon that last point) was called

away suddenly from Perlycross. His mother was obliged, in the course of nature, to look upon him now as everybody's prop and comfort; because her husband could not be regarded in that light any longer. And two or three things were coming to pass, of family import and issue, which could not go aright, except through Jemmy's fingers. And of these things the most important was concerning his sister Christina.

"I assure you, Jemmy, that her state of mind is most unsatisfactory," the lady said to her son, upon their very first consultation. "She does not care for any of her usual occupations. She takes no interest in parish matters. She let that wicked old Margery Daw get no less than three pairs of blankets, and Polly Church go without any at all—at least she might, so far as Christie cared. Then you know that admirable Huggins' Charity—a loaf and three halfpence for every cottage containing more than nine little ones;—well, she let them pass the children from one house to another; and neither loaves nor halfpence held out at all! 'I'll make it good,' she said, 'what's the odds?' or something almost as vulgar. How thankful I was, that Sir Henry did not hear her! 'Oh I wish he had,

raythe'r,' she exclaimed with a toss of her head. You know that extremely low slangish way of saying *raythe'r* to everything. It does irritate me so, and she knows it. One would think that instead of desiring to please as excellent a man as ever lived, her one object was to annoy and disgust him. And she does not even confine herself to—to the language of good society. She has come back from Perlycross, with a sad quantity of Devonshirisms; and she always brings them out before Sir Henry, who is, as you know, a fastidious man, without any love of jocularity. And it is such a very desirable thing. I did hope it would have been all settled, before your dear father's birthday."

"Well, mother, and so it may easily be. The only point is this—after all her bad behaviour, will Sir Henry come to the scratch?"

"My dear son! My dear Jemmy, what an expression! And with reference to wedded life! But if I understand your meaning, he is only waiting my permission to propose; and I am only waiting for a favourable time. The sweetest tempered girl I ever saw; better even than yours, Jemmy, and yours has always been very fine. But now—and she has found out,

or made up, some wretched low song, and she sings it down the stairs, or even comes singing it into the room, pretending that she does not see me. All about the miseries of stepmothers. Oh she is most worrying and aggravating! And to me, who have laboured so hard for her good! Sometimes I fancy that she must have seen somebody. Surely, it never could have been at Perlycross?"

"I'll put a stop to all that pretty smartly"—the doctor exclaimed, with fine confidence. "But—but perhaps it would be better, mother, for me not to seem to take Sir Henry's part too strongly. At any rate until things come to a climax. He is coming this afternoon, you said; let him pop the question at once; and if she dares to refuse him, then let me have a turn at her. She has got a rare tongue; but I think I know something—at any rate, you know that I don't stand much nonsense."

They had scarcely settled their arrangements for her, when down the stairs came Christie, looking wonderfully pretty; but her song was not of equal beauty.

"There was an old dog, and his name was 'Shep;'
Says he to his daughter—don't you ever be a Step."

She nodded to her mother very dutifully, and to her brother with a smile that made him

laugh; and then she went out of the front-door, almost as if she felt contempt for it.

"Won't do. Won't do at all;" said Jemmy. "She'll say 'no,' this afternoon. Girls never know what they are about. But better let him bring it to the point. And then leave it to me, mother. I understand her. And she knows I am not to be trifled with."

Sir Henry Haggerstone came in time for luncheon, showed no signs of nervousness, and got on very well with everybody. He knew something of everything that is likely to be talked of anywhere; and yet he had the knack of letting down his knowledge, as a carpet for his friends to walk upon. Everybody thought —"Well, I have taught him something. He could not be expected to understand that subject. But now, from his own words, I feel that he will. What a fool Smith is, to be bothering a man like Sir Henry with the stuff that is *a. b. c.* to him! I wonder that he could put up with it."

But however great Sir Henry was in powers of conversation, or even of auscultation, his eloquence—if there was any—fell flat, and his audience was brief, and the answer unmistakable.

"It can't be. It mustn't be. It shan't be,

at any price." That last expression was a bit of slang, but it happened to fit the circumstances.

"But why can it not be? Surely, Miss Fox, I may ask you to give me some reason for that."

The gentleman thought—"What a strange girl you are!" While the lady was thinking —"What a difference there is between an artificial man and a natural one!"

"What o'clock is it, by that time-piece, if you please, Sir Henry Haggerstone?"

"Half-past two, within about two minutes."

"Thank you; can you tell me why it isn't half-past ten? Just because it isn't. And so now you understand."

"I am sorry to say, that I do not very clearly. Probably it is very stupid of me. But can you not give me a little hope, Miss Fox?"

"Yes, a great deal; and with my best wishes. There are thousands of nice girls, a thousand times nicer than I ever was, who would say 'yes,' in a minute."

"But the only one, whose 'yes' I want, says 'no,' in less than half a minute!"

"To be sure, she does—and means it all over; but begs to offer no end of thanks."

"Perhaps it is all for the best," he thought

as he rode homeward slowly; "she is a very sweet girl; but of late she seems to have grown so fond of slang expressions—all very well for a man, but not at all what I like in a woman. I should have been compelled to break her of that trick; and even the sweetest-tempered woman hates to be corrected."

This gentleman would have been surprised to hear that the phrases he disliked were used, because he so thoroughly disliked them. Which, to say the least, was unamiable.

"All settled? Hurrah! My dear Chris, let me congratulate you," cried Jemmy rushing in with a jaunty air, though he well knew what the truth was.

"Amen! It is a happy thing. That golden parallelogram, all tapered and well-rounded, will come to harass me no more."

"What a mixture of quotations! A girl alone could achieve it. A tapered parallelogram! But you have never been fool enough to refuse him?"

"I have been wise enough to do so."

"And soon you will be wise enough to think better of it. I shall take good care to let him know, that no notice is to be taken of your pretty little vagaries."

"Don't lose your temper, my dear Jemmy.

As for taking notice of it, Sir Henry may be nothing very wonderful. But at any rate he is a gentleman."

"I am heartily glad that you have found that out. I thought nobody could be a gentleman, unless he lived in a farm-house, and could do a day's ploughing, and shear his own sheep."

"Yes, oh yes! If he can roll his own pills, and mix his own black draughts, and stick a knife into any one."

"Now, it is no use trying to insult me, my dear girl. My profession is above all that."

"What, above it's own business? Oh Jemmy, Jemmy! And yet you know, you were afraid sometimes of leaving it all to that little boy George. However George did the best part of it."

"Christie, I shall be off, because you don't know what you are talking of. I am sorry for any man, who gets you."

"Ha! That depends upon whether I like him. If I do, wouldn't I polish his boots? If I don't, wouldn't I have the hair off his head?"

"Good-bye, my dear child. You will be better, by and by."

"Stop," exclaimed Christie, who perceived that dear Jemmy preferred to have it out with

her, when she might be less ready; "don't be in such a hurry. There is no child with the measles, which is about the worst human complaint that you can cure. Just answer me one question. Have I ever interfered, between you and Nicie Waldron?"

"The Lord look down upon me! What an idea! As if you could ever be so absurd!"

"The Lord looks down upon me, also, Jemmy;" said Christie, passing into a different mood. "And He gives me the right to see to my own happiness, without consulting you; any more than you do me."

The Doctor made off, without another word; for he was not a quarrelsome fellow; especially when he felt that he would get the worst of it.

"Let her alone a bit;" he told his mother. "She has been so much used to have her own way, that she expects to have it always. It will require a little judgment, and careful handling, to bring her out of her absurdities. You must not expect her to have the sense a man has. And she has got an idea that she is so clever; which makes her confoundedly obstinate. If you had heard how insolent she was to me, you would have been angry with her. But she cannot vex me with her childish little talk. I shall go for a thirty mile ride,

dear mother, to get a little fresh air after all that. Don't expect me back to dinner. Be distant with her, and let her see that you are grieved; but give her no chance of arguing—if indeed she calls such stuff argument."

In a few minutes he was on the back of *Perle*—as he called the kindly and free-going little mare, who had brought him again from Perlycross—and trotting briskly towards the long curve of highlands, which form the western bulwark of the Mendip Hills. The weather had been very mild and rather stormy, ever since the Christmas frost broke up, and now in the first week of the year, the air was quite gentle and pleasant. But the roads were heavy and very soft, as they always are in a thaw; and a great deal of water was out in the meadows, and even in the ditches alongside of the lanes.

In a puzzle of country roads and commons, further from home than his usual track, and very poorly furnished with guide-posts, Fox rode on without asking whither; caring only for the exercise and air, and absorbed in thought about the present state of things, both at Perlycross and Foxden. To his quick perception and medical knowledge it was clear that his father's strength was failing, gradually,

but without recall. And one of the very few things that can be done by medical knowledge is that it can tell us (when it likes) that it is helpless.

Now Jemmy was fond of his father, although there had been many breezes between them; and as nature will have it, he loved him a hundredfold, now that he was sure to lose him. Moreover the change in his own position, which must ensue upon his father's death, was entirely against his liking. What he liked was simplicity, plain living and plain speaking, with enough of this world's goods to help a friend in trouble, or a poor man in distress; but not enough to put one in a fright about the responsibility, that turns the gold to lead. But now, if he should be compelled to take his father's place at Foxden, as a landowner and a wealthy man, he must give up the practice of his beloved art, he must give up the active and changeful life, the free and easy manners, and the game with Bill and Dick; and assume the slow dignity and stiff importance, the consciousness of being an example and a law, and all the other briars and blackthorns in the paradise of wealth and station. Yet even while he sighed at the coming transformation, it never occurred to him that his sister was endowed with tastes

no less simple than his own, and was not compelled by duty to forego them.

Occupied thus, and riding loose-reined without knowing or caring whither, he turned the corner of a high-banked lane, and came upon a sight which astonished him. The deep lane ended with a hunting-gate, leading to an open track across a level pasture, upon which the low sun cast long shadows of the rider's hat, and shoulders, and elbow lifted to unhasp the gate. Turning in the saddle he beheld a grand and fiery sunset, such as in mild weather often closes a winter but not wintry day.

A long cloud-bank, straight and level at the base, but arched and pulpy in its upper part, embosomed and turned into a deep red glow the yellow flush of the departing sun. Below this great volume of vapoury fire, were long thin streaks of carmine, pencilled very delicately on a background of limpid hyaline. It was not the beauty of the sky however, nor the splendour, nor the subtlety, that made the young man stop and gaze. Fine sunsets he had seen by the hundred, and looked at them, if there was time to spare; but what he had never seen before was the grandeur of the earth's reply.

On the opposite side of the level land, a furlong

or so in front of him, arose the great breastwork to leagues of plain; first a steep pitch of shale and shingle, channelled with storm-lines, and studded with gorse; and then, from its crest, a tall crag towering, straight and smooth as a castle-wall. The rugged pediment was dark and dim, and streaked with sombre shadows; but the bastion cliff above it mantled with a deep red glow, as if colour had its echo, in answer to the rich suffusion of that sunset cloud. Even the ivy, and other creepers, on its kindled face shone forth, like chaplets thrown upon a shield of ruddy gold. And all the environed air was thrilling with the pulses of red light.

Fox was smitten with rare delight—for he was an observant fellow—and even *Perle's* bright eyes expanded, as if they had never seen such a noble vision. "I'll be up there before it is gone," cried Jemmy, like a boy in full chase of a rainbow; "the view from that crag must be glorious."

At the foot of the hill stood a queer little hostel, called the *Smoking Limekiln*; and there he led his mare into the stable, ordered some bread and cheese for half an hour later, and made off at speed for the steep ascent. Active as he was and sound of foot, he found it a

slippery and awkward climb, on account of the sliding shingle; but after a sharp bout of leaping and scrambling he stood at the base of the vertical rock, and looked back over the lowlands.

The beauty of colour was vanishing now, and the glory of the clouds grown sombre, for the sun had sunk into a pale gray bed; but the view was vast and striking. The fairest and richest of English land, the broad expanse of the western plains for leagues and leagues rolled before him, deepening beneath the approach of night, and shining with veins of silver, where three flooded rivers wound their way. Afar towards the north, a faint gleam showed the hovering of light, above the Severn sea; whence slender clues of fog began to steal, like snakes, up the watercourses, and the marshy inlets. Before there was time to watch them far, the veil of dusk fell over them, and things unwatched stood forth, and took a prominence unaccountable, according to the laws of twilight, arbitrary and mysterious.

Fox felt that the view had repaid his toil, and set his face to go down again, with a tendency towards bread and cheese; but his very first step caused such a slide of shingle and loose ballast, that he would have been

lucky to escape with a broken bone, had he followed it. Thereupon instead of descending there, he thought it wiser to keep along the ledge at the foot of the precipice, and search for a safer track down the hill. None however presented itself, until he had turned the corner of the limestone crag, and reached its southern side, where the descent became less abrupt and stony.

Here he was stepping sideways down, for the pitch was still sharp and dangerous, and the daylight failing in the blinks of hills, when he heard a loud shout—"Jemmy! Jemmy!"—which seemed to spring out of the earth at his feet. In the start of surprise he had shaped his lips for the answering halloa, when good luck more than discretion saved him; for both his feet slipped, and his breath was caught. By a quick turn he recovered balance; but the check had given him time to think, and spying a stubby cornel-bush, he came to a halt behind it, and looked through the branches cautiously.

Some twenty yards further down the hill, he saw a big man come striding forth from the bowels of the earth—as it seemed at first—and then standing with his back turned, and the haze beyond enlarging him. And then again, that mighty shout rang up the steep and down

the valley—"Jemmy, Jemmy, come back, I tell thee; or I'll let thee know what's what!"

Fox kept close, and crouched in his bush, for he never had seen such a man till now, unless it were in a caravan; and a shudder ran through him, as it came home that his friend down there could with one hand rob, throttle, and throw him down a mining-shaft. This made him keep a very sharp look-out, and have one foot ready for the lightest of leg-bail.

Presently a man of moderate stature, who could have walked under the other's arm, came panting and grumbling back again from a bushy track leading downwards. He flung something on the ground and asked—

"What be up now; to vetch me back up-hill for? Harvey, there bain't no sense in 'e. Maight every bit as well a' had it out, over a half pint of beer."

"Sit you there, Jem," replied the other, pressing him down on a ledge of stone with the weight of one thumb on his shoulder. Then he sat himself down on a higher ridge, and pulled out a pipe, with a sigh as loud as the bellows of a forge could compass; and then slowly spread upon the dome of his knee a patch of German punk, and struck sparks into it.

There was just light enough for Fox to see that the place where they sat was the mouth of a mining shaft, or sloping adit; over the rough stone crown of which, standing as he did upon a higher level, he could descry their heads and shoulders, and the big man's fingers as he moved them round his pipe. Presently a whiff of coarse brown smoke came floating uphill to the Doctor's nostrils; and his blood ran cold, as he began to fear that this great Harvey must be the Harvey Tremlett, of whom he had heard from Mr. Penniloe.

"Made up my maind I have. Can't stand this no longer;" said the big man, with the heavy drawl, which nature has inflicted upon very heavy men. "Can't get no more for a long day's work, than a hop o' my thumb like you does."

"And good raison why, mate. Do 'e ever do a hard day's work?" Fox could have sworn that the smaller throat gave utterance to the larger share of truth. "What be the vally of big arms and legs, when a chap dothn't care to make use of 'un?"

But the big man was not controversial. Giants are generally above that weakness. He gave a long puff, and confined himself to facts.

"Got my money: and d—d little it is.

And now I means to hook it. You can hang on, if you be vule enough."

"What an old Turk it is!" Jem replied reproachfully. "Did ever you know me throw you over, Harvey? Who is it brings you all the luck? Tell 'e what—let's go back to Clampits. What a bit o' luck that louderin' wor!"

"Hor, hor, hor!" the big man roared. "A purty lot they be to Perlycrass! To take Jemmy Kettel for a gentleman! And a doctor too! Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Doctor Jemmy Vox Kettel! Licensed to deal in zalts and zenna, powders, pills, and bolusses. Oh Jemmy, Jemmy, my eye, my eye!"

"Could do it, I'll be bound, as well as he doth. A vaine doctor, to dig up the Squire of the parish, and do it wrong way too, they zay of 'un! Vaine doctor, wasn't 'un? Oh Lord! Oh Lord!"

As these two rovers combined in a hearty roar of mirth at his expense, Dr. Jemmy Fox, instead of being grateful for a purely impartial opinion, gave way to ill feeling, and stamped one foot in passionate remonstrance. Too late he perceived that this movement of his had started a pebble below the cornel-bush, and sent it rolling down the steep. Away went

the pebble with increasing skips, and striking the crown of the pit-mouth flew just over the heads of the uncouth jokers.

"Halloa, Jemmy! Anybody up there? Just you goo, and look, my boy."

Fox shrunk into himself, as he heard those words in a quicker roar coming up to him. If they should discover him, his only chance would be to bound down the hill, reckless of neck, and desperate of accident. But the light of the sky at the top of the hill was blocked by the rampart of rock, and so there was nothing for him to be marked upon.

"Nort but a badger, or a coney there, I reckon," Jem Kettel said, after peering up the steep; and just then a rabbit of fast style of life whisked by; "Goo on, Harvey. You han't offered me no 'bacco!"

"You tak' and vinish 'un;" said the lofty-minded giant, poking his pipe between the other fellow's teeth. "And now you give opinion; if the Lord hath gived thee any."

"Well, I be up for bunkum, every bit so much as you be. But where shall us be off to? That's the p'int of zettlement. Clampits, I say. Roaring fun there, and the gim'-keepers aveared of 'e."

"Darsn't goo there yet, I tell 'e. Last thing

old moother did was to send me word, Passon to Perlycrass had got the tip on me. Don't want no bother with them blessed Beaks again."

"Wonder you didn't goo and twist the Passon's neck." The faithful mate looked up at him, as if the captain had failed of his duty, unaccountably.

"Wouldn't touch a hair of that man's head, if it wor here atwixt my two knees." Harvey Tremlett brought his fist down on his thigh, with a smack that made the stones ring round him. "Tell 'e why, Jem Kettel. He have took my little Zip along of his own chiller, and a' maneth to make a lady on her. And a lady the little wench hath a right to be—just you say the contrairy—if hanncient vam'ley, and all that, have right to count. Us Tremletts was here, long afore they Waldrons."

The smaller man appeared afraid to speak. He knew the weak point of the big man perhaps, and that silence oils all such bearings.

"Tull 'e what, Jemmy," said the other coming round, after stripping his friend's mouth of his proper pipe; "us 'll go up country—shoulder packs and be off, soon as ever the moon be up. Like to see any man stop me, I would."

He stood up, with the power of his mighty

size upon him; a man who seemed fit to stop an avalanche, and able to give as much trouble about stopping him.

"All right. I be your man;" replied the other, speaking as if he were quite as big, and upon the whole more important. "Bristol fust; and then Lunnon, if so plaise 'e. Always a bit of louderin' there. But that remindeth me of Perlycrass. Us be bound to be back by fair-time, you know. Can't afford to miss old Timberlegs."

"Time enow for that;" Harvey Tremlett answered. "Zix or zeven weeks yet to Perlycrass fair. What time wor it as old Timberlegs app'inted?"

"Ten o'clock at naight, by Churchyard wall. Reckon the old man hath another job of louderin' handy. What a spree that wor, and none a rap the wiser! Come along Harvey, let's have a pint at the *Kiln*, to drink good luck to this here new start."

The big man took his hat off, while the other jumped nimbly on a stump and flung over his head the straps of both their bundles; and then with a few more leisurely and peaceful oaths they quitted their stony platform, and began to descend the winding path, from which Jem Kettel had been recalled.

Fox was content for a minute or two with peeping warily after them, while his whole frame tingled with excitement, wrath, and horror, succeeded by a burning joy at the knowledge thus vouchsafed to him, by a higher power than fortune. As soon as he felt certain that they could not see him, even if they looked back again, he slipped from his lurking-place, and at some risk of limb set off in a straighter course than theirs for the Public house in the valley, where a feeble light was twinkling. From time to time he could hear the two rovers laughing at their leisure, probably with fine enjoyment of very bad jokes at his expense. But he set his teeth, and made more speed, and keeping his distance from them easily arrived first at the Inn, where he found his bread and cheese set forth, in a little private parlour having fair view of the Bar.

This suited him well, for his object was to obtain so clear a sight of them, that no change of dress or disguise should cast any doubt upon their identity; and he felt sure that they were wending hither to drink good speed to their enterprise. There was not much fear of their recognizing him, even if his face were known to them, which he did not think at all likely. But he provided against any such mishap, by

paying his bill beforehand, and placing his candle so that his face was in the dark. Then he fell to and enjoyed his bread and cheese; for the ride and the peril had produced fine relish, and a genuine Cheddar—now sighed for so vainly—did justice to its nativity. He also enjoyed, being now in safety, the sweet sense of turning the tables upon his wanton and hateful deriders.

For sure enough, while his mouth was full, and the froth on his ale was winking at him, in came those two scoffing fellows, followed by a dozen other miners. It appeared to be pay-night, and generous men were shedding sixpences on one another; but Fox saw enough to convince him that the rest fought shy of his two acquaintances.

When he saw this, a wild idea occurred to him for a moment—was it not possible to arrest that pair, with the aid of their brother miners? But a little consideration showed the folly of such a project. He had no warrant, no witness, no ally, and he was wholly unknown in that neighbourhood. And even if the miners should believe his tale, would they combine, to lay hands on brother workmen, and hand them over to the mercies of the law? Even if they would, it was doubtful

that they could, sturdy fellows though they were.

But the young man was so loth to let these two vagabonds get away, that his next idea was to bribe somebody to follow them, and keep them in view until he should come in chase, armed with the needful warrant, and supported by stout *posse comitatus*. He studied the faces of his friends at the Bar, to judge whether any were fitted for the job. Alas, among all those rough and honest features, there was not a spark of craft, nor a flash of swift intelligence. If one of them were put to watch another, the first thing he would do would be to go and tell him of it.

And what Justice of the Peace would issue warrant upon a stranger's deposition of hear-says? Much against his will, Jemmy Fox perceived that there was nothing for it, but to give these two rogues a wide berth for the present, keep his own counsel most jealously, and be ready to meet them at Perlycross fair. And even so, on his long homeward ride, he thought that the prospect was brightening in the west; and that he with his name cleared might come forward, and assert his love for the gentle Nicie.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO PUZZLES.

"Then if I understand aright, Lady Waldron, you wish me to drop all further efforts for the detection of those miscreants? And that too at the very moment, when we had some reason to hope that we should at last succeed. And all the outlay, which is no trifle, will have been simply thrown away! This course is so extraordinary, that you will not think me inquisitive, if I beg you to explain it."

Mr. Webber, the lawyer, was knitting his forehead, and speaking in a tone of some annoyance, and much doubt, as to the correctness of his own reluctant inference. Meanwhile the Spanish lady was glancing at him with some dismay, and then at Mr. Penniloe, who was also present, for the morning's discussion had been of business matters.

"No, I doubt very much if you quite comprehend," she answered, with Mr. Penniloe's

calm eyes fixed upon her. "I did not propose to speak entirely like that. What I was desirous of describing to you is, that to me it is less of eagerness to be going on with so much haste, until the return of my dear son. He for instance will direct things, and with his great—great command of the mind, will make the proceedings to succeed, if it should prove possible for the human mind to do it. And there is no one in this region, that can refuse him anything."

Mr. Penniloe saw that she spoke with some misgivings, and shifted her gaze from himself to the lawyer and back again, with more of enquiry, and less of dictation, than her usual tone conveyed.

"The matter is entirely one for your ladyship's own decision," replied Mr. Webber, beginning to fold up the papers he had submitted. "Mr. Penniloe has left that to us, as was correct, inasmuch as it does not concern the trust. I will stop all enquiries at once, upon receiving your instructions to that effect."

"But—but I think you do not well comprehend. Perhaps I could more clearly place it with the use of my own tongue. It is nothing more than this. I wish that my dear son should not give up his appointment as Officer,

and come back to this country, for altogether nothing. I wish that he should have the delight of thinking that—that it shall be of his own procuration, to unfold this mysterious case. Yes, that is it—that is all that I wish—to let things wait a little, until my son comes."

If either of her listeners had been very keen, or endowed with the terrier nose of suspicion, he would have observed perhaps that the lady had found some relief from an afterthought, and was now repeating it as a happy hit. But Mr. Penniloe was too large, and Mr. Webber too rough of mind—in spite of legal training—to pry into a lady's little turns of thought.

"Very well, madam," said the lawyer, rising, "that finishes our business for to-day, I think. But I beg to congratulate you on your son's return. I cannot call to mind that I have heard of it before. Every one will be delighted to see him. Even in his father's time, everybody was full of him. When may we hope to see him, Lady Waldron?"

"Before very long, I have reason for good hope," the lady replied, with a smile restoring much of the beauty of her careworn face. "I have not heard the day yet; but I know that he will come. He has to obtain permission from all the proper authorities, of course. And

that is like your very long and very costful processes of the Great British law, Mr. Webber. But now I will entreat of you to excuse me any more. I have given very long attention. Mr. Webber, will you then oblige me by being the host to Mr. Penniloe? The refreshment is in the approximate room."

"Devilish fine woman," Mr. Webber whispered, as her ladyship sailed away. "Wonderfully clever too! How she does her w's—I don't know much about them, but I always understood, that there never was any one born out of England, who could make head or tail of his w's. Why, she speaks English quite like a native! But I see you are looking at me. Shocking manners, I confess, to swear in the presence of a parson, sir; though plenty of them do it—ha, ha, ha!—in their own absence, I suppose."

"It is not my presence, Mr. Webber. That makes it neither better nor worse. But the presence of God is everywhere."

"To be sure! So it is. Come into the next room. Her ladyship said we should find something there. I suppose we shan't see Missy though," said the lawyer, as he led the Parson to the luncheon-table. "She fights very shy of your humble servant now. Girls never for-

give that sort of thing. I don't often make such a mistake though, do I? And it was my son Waldron's fault altogether. Waldron is a sharp fellow, but not like me. Can't see very far into a milestone. Pity to stop the case, before we cleared Fox. I don't understand this new turn though. A straw shows the way the wind blows. Something behind the scenes, Mr. Penniloe. More there than meets the eye. Is it true that old Fox is dropping off the hooks?"

"If you mean to ask me, Mr. Webber, what I have heard about his state of health, I fear that there is little hope of his recovery. Dr. Fox returns to-morrow, as you may have heard through—through your especial agents. You know what my opinion is of that proceeding on your part."

"Yes, you spoke out pretty plainly. And, by George, you were right, sir! As fine a property as any in the county. I had no idea it was half as much. Why, bless my heart sir, Jemmy Fox will be worth his £8000 a year, they tell me!"

"I am glad that his worth," Mr. Penniloe said quietly, "is sufficient *per annum* to relieve him from your very dark suspicion."

"Got me there!" replied Webber, with a

laugh. "Ah, you parsons always beat the lawyers. Bury us, don't you? If you find no other way. But we get the last fee after all. Probate, sir, Probate is an expensive thing. Well, I must be off. I see my gig is ready. If you can make my peace with Jemmy Fox, say a word for me. After all it looked uncommonly black, you know. And young men should be forgiving."

Scarcely had his loud steps ceased to ring, when a very light pit-a-pat succeeded, and Mr. Penniloe found himself in far more interesting company. Nicie came softly, and put back her hair, and offered her lovely white forehead to be kissed, and sat down with a smile that begged pardon for a sigh.

"Oh Uncle Penniloe, I am so glad! I thought I should never have a talk with you again. My fortune has been so frightful lately. Everything against me, the same as it has been with this dear little soul here."

She pointed to *Jess*, the wounded one, who trotted in cheerfully upon three legs, with the other strapped up in a white silk pouch. The little doggie wagged her tail, and looked up at the Clergyman, with her large eyes full of soft gratitude and love; as by that reflex action, which a dog's eyes have without

moving, they took in—and told their intense delight in—that vigilant nurse, and sweet comrade, Nicie.

"Oh, she is so proud;" Miss Waldron said, looking twice as proud herself; "this is the first time that she has had the privilege of going upon three legs, without anybody's hand; and she does think so much of herself! *Jess*, go and show Uncle Penniloe what she can do, now her health is coming back. *Jess*, go and cut a little caper—very steadily, you know, for fear of going twisty; and keep her tail up, all the time! Now *Jess* come, and have a pretty kiss; because she has earned it splendidly.

"She takes my breath away, because she is so good;" continued Nicie, leaning over her. "I have studied her character for six weeks now, and there is not a flaw to be found in it, unless it is a noble sort of jealousy. *Pixie*"—here *Jess* uttered a sharp small growl, and showed a few teeth as good as ever—"I must not mention his name again, because it won't do to excite her; but he is out in the cold altogether, because he has never shown any heroism. No, no, he shan't come, *Jess*. He is locked up, for want of chivalry. Oh, Uncle Penniloe, there is one question I have long

been wanting to ask you. Do you think it possible for even God to forgive the man—the brute I mean—who slashed this little dear like that, for being so loving, and so true?"

"My dear child," Mr. Penniloe replied; "I have just been saying to myself, how like your dear father you are growing—in goodness and kindness of face, I mean. But when you look like that, the resemblance is quite lost. I should never have thought you capable of such a ferocious aspect."

"Ah, that is because you don't know what I can do." But as she spoke, her arched brows were relaxing, and her flashing eyes filled with their usual soft gleam. "You forget that I am half a Spaniard still, or at any rate a quarter one, and therefore I can be very terrible sometimes. Ah, you should have seen me the other day. I let somebody know who I am. He thought perhaps that butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. Did not I astonish him, the impertinent low wretch?"

"Why, Nicie, this is not at all like you! I always quote you as a model of sweet temper. Who can have aroused your angry passions thus?"

"Oh, never mind. I should like to tell you, and I want to tell you very much. But

I am not permitted, though I don't know why. My mother has begged me particularly not to speak of that man who came—gentleman, I suppose he would call himself—but there, I am telling you all about him! And mother is so different, and so much more humble now. If she were still as unfair as she was, I should not be so particular. But she seems to be so sad, and so mysterious now, without accusing any one. And so I will not say a word against her orders. You would not wish it, Uncle Penniloe, I am sure."

"Certainly not, my dear. I will not ask another question. I have noticed that your mother is quite different myself. I hope she is not falling into really bad health."

"No, I don't think that. But into frightfully low spirits. We have enough to account for that, haven't we, Uncle Penniloe? To think of my dear father, all this time! What can I do? I am so wretchedly helpless. I try to trust in God, and to say to myself—'What does the earthly part matter, after all? When the soul is with the Lord, or only waiting for His time, and perhaps rewarded all the better—because—because of wicked treatment here.' But oh, it won't do, Uncle Penniloe, it won't, when I think how noble

and how good he was, and to be treated in that way! And then I fall away, and cry, and sob, and there comes such a pain—such a pain in my heart, that I have no breath left, and can only lie down, and pray that God would take me to my father. Is it wicked? I suppose it is. But how am I to help it?"

"No, my dear, it is not wicked to give way sometimes." The Parson's voice was tremulous, at sight of her distress, and remembrance of his own, not so very long ago. "Sorrow is sent to all of us, and doubtless for our good; and if we did not feel it, how could we be at all improved by it? But you have borne it well, my child; and so has your good mother, considering how the first sad blow has been doubled and prolonged so strangely. But now it will be better for you, ever so much better, Nicie, with your dear brother home again."

"But when will that be? Perhaps not for years. We do not even know where he is. They were not likely to stay long in Malta. He may be at the Cape of Good Hope by this time, if the ship has had long enough to get there. Everything seems to be so much against us."

"Are you sure that you are right, my dear?" Mr. Penniloe asked with no little sur-

prise. "From what your mother said just now, I hoped that I should see my old pupil very soon."

"I am afraid not, Uncle Penniloe. My dear mother seems to confuse things a little, or not quite understand them. Through her late illness, no doubt it is. We have not had a word from Tom, since that letter, which had such a wonderful effect, as I told you, when you were gone to London. And then, if you remember, he had no idea how long they were to be at Valetta. And he said nothing about their future movements very clearly. So full of his duties, no doubt, that he had no time to write long particulars. Even now he may never have heard of—of what has happened, and our sad condition. They may have been at sea, ever since he wrote. Soldiers can never tell where they may have to be."

"That has always been so, and is a part of discipline;" the Parson was thinking of the Centurion and his men. "But even if your letter should have gone astray, they must have seen some English newspapers, I should think."

"Tom is very clever, as you know, Uncle Penniloe; but he never reads a word, when he can help it. And besides that, it is only

fair to remember that he is under Government. And the Government never neglects an opportunity of turning right into left, and the rest upside down. If all the baggage intended for their draft, was sent to the West Indies, because they were ordered to the East, it ought to follow that their letters would go too. But the worst of it is that one cannot be sure they will stick to a mistake, after making it."

"It is most probable that they would; especially if it were pointed out to them. Your dear father told me that they never forgive anybody for correcting them. But how then could your mother feel so sure about Tom's coming home almost immediately?"

"It puzzles me, until I have time to think;" answered Nicie, looking down. "She has never said a word to me about it, beyond praying and hoping for Tom to come home. Oh, I know, or at least I can guess, how! She may have had a dream—she believes firmly in her dreams, and she has not had time to tell me yet."

Mr. Penniloe had no right to seek further, and no inclination so to do. The meanest, mangiest, and most sneaking understrapper of that recent addition to our liberal institutions—

the "Private Enquiry Firm"—could never have suspected Nicie Waldron, after looking at her, of any of those subterfuges, which he (like a slack-skin'd worm) wriggles into. But on the other hand who could suppose that Lady Waldron would endeavour to mislead her own man of business by a trumpery deceit? And yet who was that strange visitor, of whom her daughter was not allowed to speak?

Unable to understand these things, the curate shortly took his leave, being resolved, like a wise man, to think as little as he could about them, until Time—that mighty locksmith, at whom even Love rarely wins the latest laugh—should bring his skeleton key to bear on the wards of this enigma.

What else can a busy man do, when puzzled even by his own affairs? And how much more must it be so, in the business of other persons, which he doubts his right to meddle with? Perhaps it would have been difficult to find any male member of our race more deeply moved by the haps and mishaps of his fellow-creatures than this Parson of Perlycross; and yet he could take a rosier view for most of them than they took for themselves. So when he left the grounds of Walderscourt, he buttoned up his Spencer, and stepped out bravely,

swinging his stick vigorously, and trusting in the Lord.

"What did 'e hat me vor, like that?" cried a voice of complaint from a brambled ditch, outside a thick copse known as "Puddicombe Wood." Mr. Penniloe had not got his glasses on, and was grieved to feel rather than to see, although he was at the right end of his stick, that he had brought it down (with strong emphasis of a passage in his coming sermon) on the head of a croucher in that tangled ditch.

"Oh I beg your pardon! I am so sorry. I had not the least idea there was anybody there. I was thinking of the Sower, and the cares that choke the seed. But get up, and let me see what I have done. What made you hide yourself down there? I am not the game-keeper. Why, it is Sam Speccotty! Poaching again, I am afraid, Sam. But I hope I have not hurt you—so very much."

"Bruk' my head in two. That's what you have done, Passon. Oh you can't goo to tell on me, after hatting me on the brains with clubstick! Ooh, ooh, ooh! I be gooing to die, I be."

"Speccotty, no lies, and no shamming!" Mr. Penniloe put on his spectacles, for he knew his customer well enough,—a notorious poacher,

but very seldom punished, because he was considered "a natural." "This is no clubstick, but a light walking-stick; and between it and your head there was a thick briar, as well as this vast mop of hair. Let me see what you have got under that tree-root."

Sam had been vainly endeavouring to lead his Minister away from his own little buried napkin, or rather sack of hidden treasure. "Turn it out;" commanded the Parson, surprised at his own austerity.

"A brace of cock-pheasants, a couple of woodcocks, two couple of rabbits, and a leash of hares! Oh, Sam, Sam! What have you done? Speccotty, I am ashamed of you."

"Bain't no oother chap within ten maile," said Speccotty, regarding the subject from a different point of view; "as could a' dooed that, since dree o'clock this marnin'; now Passon do 'e know of wan?"

"I am happy to say that I do not; neither do I wish for his acquaintance. Give up your gun, Sam. Even if I let you off, I insist upon your tools; as well as all your plunder."

"Han't a got no goon," replied the poacher, looking slyly at the Parson, through the rough shock of his hair. "Never vired a goon, for

none on 'un. Knows how to vang 'un, wi'out thiccy."

"I can well believe that." Mr. Penniloe knew not a little of poachers, from his boyish days, and was not without that secret vein of sympathy for them, which every sportsman has, so long as they elude and do not defy the law. "But I must consider what I shall do. Send all this to my house to-night, that I may return it to the proper owners. Unless you do that, you will be locked up to-morrow."

"Oh Passon, you might let me have the Roberts. To make a few broth for my old moother."

"Not a hair, nor a feather shall you keep. Your mother shall have some honest broth—but none of your stolen rabbits, Speccotty. You take it so lightly, that I fear you must be punished."

"Oh don't 'e give me up, sir. Oh, my poor head do go round so! Don't 'e give me up, for God's sake, Passon. Two or dree things I can tell 'e, as 'e 'd give the buttons off thy coat to know on. Do 'e mind when the Devil wor seen on Hagdon Hill, the day avore the good lady varled all down the Harseshoe?"

"I do remember hearing some foolish story,

Sam, and silly people being frightened by some strange appearances, very easily explained, no doubt."

"You volk, as don't zee things, can make 'un any colour to your own liking. But I tell 'e old Nick gooed into the body of a girt wild cat up there; and to this zide of valley, her be toorned to a black dog. Zayeth so in the Baible, don't 'un?"

"I cannot recall any passage, Sam, to that effect; though I am often surprised by the knowledge of those who use Holy Scripture for argument, much more freely than for guidance. And I fear that is the case with you."

"Whuther a' dooed it, or whuther a' did not, I be the ekal of 'un, that I be. When her coom to me, a gapin' and a yawnin', I up wi' bill-hook, and I gie'd 'un zummat. If 'tis gone back to hell a' harth, a' wun't coom out again, I reckon, wi'out Sam Speccotty's mark on 'un. 'Twill zave 'e a lot of sarmons, Passon. Her 'ont want no more knockin' on the head, this zide of Yester, to my reckoning. Hor! Passon be gone a'ready; a' don't want to hear of that. Taketh of his trade away. Ah, I could tell 'un zomethin', if a' wadn't such a softie."

Mr. Penniloe had hastened on, and no longer swung his holly-stick; not through fear of

knocking any more skulking poachers on the head, but from the sadness which always fell upon him, at thought of the dark and deadly blow the Lord had been pleased to inflict on him.

CHAPTER XII.

FRANKLY SPEAKING.

Supposing a man to be engaged—as he often must be even now, when the general boast of all things is, that they have done themselves by machinery—in the useful and interesting work of sinking a well, by his own stroke and scoop; and supposing that, when he is up to his hips, and has not got a dry thread upon him, but reeks and drips, like a sprawling jelly-fish—at such a time there should drop upon him half a tea-spoonful of water from the bucket he has been sending up—surely one might expect that man to accept with a smile that little dribble, even if he perceives it.

Alas, he does nothing of the kind! He swears, and jumps, as if he were in a shower-bath of vitriol, then he shouts for the ladder, drags his drenched legs up, and ascends for the purpose of thrashing his mate, who has dared to let a drop slip down on him. Such is the

case; and no ratepayer who has had to delve for his own water (after being robbed by sewage-works) will fail to perceive the force of it.

Even so (if it be lawful to compare small things with great) even so it has been, and must be for ever, with a young man over head and ears in love, and digging in the depths of his own green gault. He throws back his head, and he shovels for his life; he scorns the poor fellows who are looking down upon him; and he sends up bucketfuls of his own spooning, perhaps in the form of gravelly verse. The more he gets waterlogged, the deeper is his glow, and the bowels of the earth are as gold-beaters' skin to him. But let anybody cast cold water, though it be but a drop, on his fervid frozen loins, and up he comes with both fists clenched.

These are the truths that must be cited, in explanation of the sad affair next to be recorded —the quarrel between two almost equally fine fellows,—Dr. Jemmy Fox to wit, and Master Frank Gilham. These two had naturally good liking for each other. There was nothing very marvellous about either of them; although their respective mothers perceived a heavenful of that quality. But they might be regarded as

fair specimens of Englishmen—more wonderful perhaps than admirable, in the eyes of other races. If it were needful for any one to make choice between them, that choice would be governed more by points of liking, than of merit. Both were brave, straightforward, stubborn, sensible, and self-respecting fellows, a little hot-headed sometimes perhaps, but never consciously unjust.

It seemed a great pity, that such a pair should fall away from friendship, when there were so many reasons for goodwill and amity; not to mention gratitude—that flower of humanity, now extinct, through the number of its cuttings that have all damped off. Jemmy Fox indeed had cherished a small slip of that, when Gilham stood by him in his first distress; but unhappily the slightest change of human weather is inevitably fatal to our very miffy plant.

Young as he was, Frank Gilham had been to market already too many times, to look for offal value in gratitude, and indeed he was too generous to regard it as his due; still his feelings of friendship, and of admiration for the superior powers of the other, were a little aggrieved when he found himself kept at a distance, and avoided, for reasons which he

understood too well. So when he heard that young Dr. Fox had returned from that visit to his father, he rode up to Old Barn, to call upon him, and place things upon a plainer footing.

Jemmy received him in a friendly manner, but with his mind made up, to put a stop to any nonsense concerning his sister Christie, if Gilham should be fool enough to afford him any opening. And this the young yeoman did without delay, for he saw no good reason why he should be made too little of.

"And how did you leave Miss Fox?" he asked, as they took their chairs opposite the great fireplace, in the bare room, scientific with a skull or two, and artistic with a few of Christie's water-colour sketches.

"I had no difficulty in leaving her," Jemmy answered, with a very poor attempt at wit, which he intended to be exasperating.

"How was she, I mean? I dare say you got away, without thinking much of anybody but yourself." Frank Gilham was irritated, as he deserved to be.

"Thank you; well, I think upon the whole," Jemmy Fox drawled out his words, as if his chin were too slack to keep them going, and he stroked it in a manner which is always hateful; "yes, I think I may say upon the whole, that

she was quite as well as can be expected. I hope you can say the same of your dear mother."

Frank Gilham knew that he was challenged to the combat; and he came forth, as the duty is, and the habit of an Englishman.

"This is not the first time you have been rude to me;" he said. "And I won't pretend not to know the reason. You think that I have been guilty of some presumption, in daring to lift my eyes to your sister."

"To tell you the truth," replied Fox getting up, and meeting his steadfast gaze steadfastly; "you have expressed my opinion, better than I could myself have put it."

"It is not the sort of thing one can argue about," said the other, also rising; "I know very well that she is too good for me, and has the right to look ever so much higher. But for all that, I have a perfect right to set my heart upon her; especially considering—considering, that I can't help it. And if I do nothing to annoy her, or even to let her know of my presumption, what right have you to make a grievance of it?"

"I have never made a grievance of it. I simply wish you to understand, that I do not approve of it."

"You have a perfect right to disapprove;

and to let me know that you do so. Only it would have been more to your credit, if you had done it in an open manner, and in plain English; instead of cutting me, or at any rate dropping my acquaintance. I don't call that straightforward."

"The man is a jackass. What rot he talks! Look here, my fine fellow. How could I speak to you about it, before you acknowledged your infatuation? Could I come up to you in the street, and say—'Hi there! You are in love with my sister, are you? If you want to keep a sound skin, you'll haul off.' Is that the straightforward course I should have taken?"

"Well, there may be something in the way you put it. But I would leave it to anybody, whether you have acted fairly. And why should I haul off, I should like to know? I won't haul off, for fifty of you. Because I have got no money, I suppose! How would you like to be ordered to haul off from Miss Waldron, in case you were to lose your money, or anything went against you? Instead of hauling off, I'll hold on—in my own mind, at any rate. I don't want a farthing of the money of your family. I would rather not have it,—dirty stuff, what good is it? But I tell you what—if your dear sister would only give me

one good word, I would snap my fingers at you, and everybody. I know I am nothing at all. However, I am quite as good as you are; though not to be spoken of, in the same week with her. I tell you, I don't care twopence for any man, or all the men in the world put together—if only your sister thinks well of me. So now, you know what you may look out for."

"All this is very fine; but it won't do, Gilham." Fox thought he saw his way to settle him. "Surely you are old enough to see the folly of getting so excited. My sister will very soon be married to Sir Henry Haggerstone—a man of influence, and large fortune. And you—, well to some lady, who can see your value, through a ball of glass, as you do. That power is not given to all of us; but on no account would I disparage you. And when this little joke is over, you will come, and beg my pardon; and we shall be hearty friends again."

"Sir Henry Haggerstone!" Gilham replied, in a tone of contempt, which would justly have astonished that exemplary baronet. "Not she! Why, that's the old codger that has had three wives—fiddles, and fiddlesticks, I'm not afraid of him! But just tell me one thing now,

upon your honour. Would you object to me, if she liked me, and I had a hundred thousand pounds?"

"Well, no, I don't know that I should, Mr. Gilham."

"Then, Dr. Fox, you would sell your sister, for a hundred thousand pounds. And if she likes to put a lower price upon herself, what right have you to stop her?"

"I tell you, Gilham, all this is childish talk. If Christie has been fool enough to take a fancy to you, it is your place, as a man of honour, to bear in mind how young she is; and to be very careful that you do nothing to encourage it."

"But there is no chance of such luck. Has it ever seemed likely to you, my dear Jemmy, that she—that she even had any idea——"

"A great deal too much, I am afraid. At least, I don't mean to say that exactly—but at any rate—well, enough to place you on your honour."

"And upon my honour I will be—not to neglect any shadow of a chance, that turns up in my favour. But I can never believe it, Jemmy; she is ever so much too lofty, and too lovely, and too clever—did anybody ever see such fingers, and such eyes, and such a smile, and such a voice? And altogether——"

"Altogether a pack of rubbish. The sooner you order your horse, the better. I can't have you raving here, and fetching all the parish up the hill."

"I am a sensible man, Jemmy Fox. I know a noble thing, when I see it. You are too small of nature, and too selfish for such perception. But you may abuse me, to your heart's content. You will never get a harsh word in reply; after what you have told me. Because there must be good in you, or you would never have such a sister. I shall take my own course now; without the smallest consideration for your crotchets. Now don't make any mistake about that. And as for honour—clearly understand, that I shall pitch it to the Devil."

"Well, don't come here with any more of your raving. And don't expect me to encourage you. You have been a good fellow—I don't mind saying that—until you took this infernal craze."

"Oh, I won't trouble you; never you fear. You are doing what you think right, no doubt; and you are welcome to do your worst. Only there is one thing I must say. I know that you are too much of a man, to belie me to your sister, or run me down, behind my back. Shake

hands, Jemmy, before I go; perhaps we shall never shake hands again."

"Get somebody to leave you that hundred thousand pounds," said Fox, as he complied with this request; "and then we'll shake hands all day long, instead of shaking fists at each other."

"Jem Crow said to his first wife's mother,
What right have you to be anybody's brother?"

Gilham responded, being in high spirits, with this quotation from that piece of negro doggerel, with which all England was at that time crazed. And thus they parted, with a neutral smile; and none the less perhaps, for that each of them perceived that the parting would prove a long one.

"What will Nicie have to say about all this? I shall not be contented until I know;" said Fox to himself, when his visitor was gone; "I have a great mind to go and get my riding-gaiters. That blessed mother of hers can scarcely growl at me, if I call to-day; considering how long I have been away. I seem to knock under to everybody now. I can't think what has come over me."

When a man begins to think that of himself, it shows that he is getting pugnacious, and has not found his proper outlet. The finest thing

for him is a long ride then; or a long walk, if he has only two legs. Fox was shaking down upon his merits, but still a little crusty with himself, and therefore very much so with every one outside it—when his pretty mare pulled up, to think about the water she was bound to walk through at Priestwell.

This is one of the fairest hamlets to be found in England. There are houses enough to make one think of the other people that live in them; but not so many as to make it certain that a great many people will be nasty. You might expect, if you lived there, to know something about everybody in the place; and yet only to lift up your hands, and smile, when they did a thing you were too wise to do. The critical inhabitant in such a place—unless he is very wicked—must be happy. He falls into a habitude of small smiles; "many a mickle makes a muckle"—if that be the right way to quote it, which it isn't—however the result is all the same, he knows what he is about, and it leads him to smile twenty times, for one smile he would have had in town.

All these things were producing a fine effect upon the character of Dr. Gronow. By head and shoulders, without standing up for himself for a single moment, he was the biggest man

at Priestwell; in knowledge of the world, in acquaintance with books, in power to give good advice, and to help the people who took it—the largest. And after the many hot contentions of his life, and the trouble in being understood (where the game never pays for the candle) here he was taken at his own appraisement, after liberal prepayment.

He was not a bad man, take him all in all; though inclined by nature to be many-angled, rather than many-sided. And now, as he stood on the plank that goes over the brook where the road goes under it, he was about as happy as the best of men can be. The old Doctor in truth was as full of delight—though his countenance never expressed it—as the young Doctor was of dejection. And why? For the very noble reason, that the wiser man now had his fly-rod in hand, fly-book in pocket, creel on back, and waterproof boots upon stiff but sturdy legs. And, main point of all—he was just setting forth; his return must be effected perhaps in quite another pair of shoes.

The Priestwell water flows into the Perle from the north, some half mile higher up than the influx of Susscot brook from the south, and it used to be full of bright stickles and dark hovers, peopled with many a bouncing trout.

For a trout of a pound is a bouncer there; and a half-pounder even is held a comely fish; and sooth to say, the angler is not so churlish as to fail of finding joy in one of half that size. Not a sign of Spring was on the earth as yet, and very little tidings of it in the air; but any amount was in the old man's heart, as he listened to the warbling of the brook, and said to himself that he should catch, perhaps, a fish. He was going to fish downwards, as he always did, for he never liked to contradict the water.

At the elbow of the stream was his own willow-tree, at the bottom of his lawn, and there a big fish lived—the Dr. Gronow of the liquid realm, who defied the Dr. Gronow of the dry land. Ha, why not tackle him this very afternoon, and ennoble the opening day thereby? For the miserable floods, and the long snow-time, and the shackling of the stream is over; no water-colour artist could have brought the stickles to a finer fishing tint; and lo there is a trout upon the rise down there, tempted by the quiver of a real iron-blue!

With these thoughts glowing in his heart, and the smoke of his pipe making rings upon the naked alder-twigs, he was giving his flies the last titivating touch—for he always fished with three, though two were one

too many—when he heard a voice not too encouraging.

"I say, Doctor, if you don't look out, you'll be certain to get bogged, you know."

"Don't care if I do;" replied the Doctor, whisking his flies around his head, and startling *Perle* with the flash of his rod.

"You had better go home," continued Jemmy, "and let the banks dry up a bit, and some of your fish have time to breed again. Why, the floods must have washed them all down into the Perle; and the Perle must have washed them all down into the sea."

"That shows how much you know about it. I have got a most splendid patent dodge, at the bottom of my last meadow. I'll show it to you some fine day, if you are good. It is so constructed that it keeps all my trout from going down into the Perle, and yet it lets all the Perle trout come up to me; and when they are up, they can't get back again of course. And the same thing reversed, at the top of my grounds. I expect to have more fish than pebbles in my brook. And nobody can see it, that's the beauty of it. But mind, you mustn't say a word about it, Jemmy. People are so selfish!"

"Of course, I won't; you may trust me.

But when you have got everybody else's fish in your water, can you get them out of it? I know nothing at all about it. But to make any hand of angling, is it not the case that you must take to it in early life? Look at Pike, for instance. What a hand he is! Never comes home without a basketful. He'll be here again next week, I believe."

Fox knew well enough that Dr. Gronow hated the very name of Pike.

"I am truly sorry to hear it. I am sure it must be high time for that lad to go to College. Penniloe ought to be sent to prison, for keeping such a poacher. But as for myself, if I caught too many, I should not enjoy it half so much, because I should think there was no skill in it."

"Well now, I never thought of that. And *pari ratione* if we save too many of our patients, we lay ourselves open to the charge of luck."

"No fear for you, Jemmy. You are not a lucky fellow. Come in and have a talk with me, by and by. I want to hear the last news, if there is any."

"Yes, there is some. But I must tell you now, or never. For I have to ride round through Pumpington. And I came this way on purpose, to get the benefit of your opinion."

"But, my dear fellow, it gets dark so soon;" Dr. Gronow looked wistfully at his flies. "Well, if you won't be more than five minutes, I will put an iron-blue on, instead of a Half-Kingdon. But don't be longer than you can help. You are the only man in the parish I would stop for."

Omitting all description, except of persons, Fox told the elder doctor what he had learned at the mouth of the Mendip mine, and at the *Smoking Limekiln*, as well as what he knew of Harvey Tremlett from Mr. Penniloe's account, reminding him also of Joe Crang's description, and showing how well it tallied.

"My advice can be given in a word; and that is 'Not a word;'" answered Gronow, forgetting his flies for the moment. "Not a word to any one, but Mockham the magistrate; and not even to him, until needful. Shrove Tuesday, you say, is the date of the Fair. Don't apply for your warrant, until that morning, if you can get it then without delay. Only you must make sure that Mockham will be at home to issue it, and you must have Joe Crang there quietly, and gag him somewhere for the rest of the day—perhaps a little opiate in his beer. You see it is of the first importance that not a word should leak out about

your intention of nabbing those fellows at the Fair, until you are down upon them; for your birds would never come near the trap. It is perfectly amazing how such things spread, faster than any bird can fly; for the whole world seems to be in league against the law. There is plenty of time for us to talk it over, between this and then, if you only keep it close. Of course you have not mentioned it to anybody yet."

"Not to a soul. I had sense enough for that. But I might have done so before long, if I had missed meeting you to-day. Shall I not tell even Penniloe? He has known everything hitherto."

"Certainly not yet. He is quite safe of course, so far as mere intention goes; but he might make a slip, and he is a nervous man. For his own sake, he had better not have this upon his mind. And his ideas are so queer. If he were questioned, I feel sure that he would not even tell a white lie; but be frightfully clumsy, and say, 'I refuse to answer.' Better tell the whole truth than do that; for suspicion is shrewder than certainty."

"But I don't like concealing it from him at all. I fear he will be hurt, when he comes to know it; because we have acted together

throughout, and the matter so closely concerns his parish."

"Have no fear, Jemmy. I'll make that all right. We will tell him about it on the day of action, and let him know that for his own sake only, I persuaded you to keep it from him. Why, that fellow's daughter is in his house, and a wonderfully clever imp, they say. And I am not at all sure that he would not preach about it. He thinks so much more of people's souls, than of their parts that are rational."

"Very well then, for his own sake, I won't say a word to him about it. You are right; it would make him miserable, to have such a shindy so long in prospect. For it will be a rare fight, I can tell you. The fellow is as big as an elephant almost; and my namesake, Jem Kettel, is a stuggy young chap, very likely to prove a tough customer. And then there will be Timberlegs, whoever he may be."

"All right, Jemmy, we will give a good account of them. Mind *v.* Matter always wins the verdict. But let me congratulate you upon your luck. We must get to the bottom of this strange affair now, if we can only nab those fellows."

"I should hope so. But how do you think

it will prove? Who will be detected as the leading villain? For these rogues have only been hired of course."

"Well, I own myself puzzled, Jemmy, worse than ever. Until this last news of yours, I was inclined to think that there had been some strange mistake all through, while the good Colonel slept still undisturbed. But now it appears that I must have been wrong. And I hardly like to tell you my last idea, because of your peculiar position."

"I know what you mean, and I thank you for it;" Fox replied with a rapid glance. "But to my mind that seems the very reason why I should know everything."

"Well, if you take it so, friend Jemmy, as my first theory is now proved wrong, my second one is that Lady Waldron knows more about this matter than anybody else. She has always shown herself hostile to you, so that my idea cannot shock you, as otherwise it might. Are you angry with me?"

"Not in the least; though I cannot believe it, thereby returning good for evil; for she was quick enough to believe it—or feign to do so—about me. There are things that tend towards your conclusion. I am sorry to acknowledge that there are. And yet, until it is posi-

tively proved, I will not think it possible. She is no great favourite of mine, you know, any more than I am of hers. Also I am well aware that women do things a man never would believe; and some women don't mind doing anything. But I cannot persuade myself that she is one of that sort. She has too much pride, to be a hypocrite."

"So I should have thought. But against facts, where are you? Shrove Tuesday will tell us a thing or two however. That is a very nice mare of yours. I know nothing of horses, but judge them by their eyes; though their legs are the proper study. Good-bye, my boy! Perhaps I shall amaze you with a dish of trout to-morrow. They are always in very fine condition here."

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.